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Chapter 1. SUDDEN DEATH

ON APRIL 14th, 1941, HAVING OVERRUN YUGOSLAVIA AND ALSO SALONIKA IN NORTHERN GREECE, HITLER ORDERED HIS ARMIES TO PUSH SOUTHWARDS...AND DISASTER AFTER DISASTER WAS INFLICTED UPON THE GREEK DIVISIONS WHO, WITH THEIR MULES AND HORSES, WERE NO MATCH FOR THE ARMOURED GIANTS OF THE GERMAN PANZER CORPS.

AND NEITHER COULD THE PITIFULLY SMALL BRITISH FORCES REPEL THE IRON MIGHT ARRAYED AGAINST THEM.

BY THE 16th. OF APRIL, JUST TWO DAYS AFTER THE INITIAL GERMAN ASSAULT, THE BRAVE GREEK ARMY HAD COLLAPSED, AND THE BRITISH FORCES WERE ORDERED TO RETIRE. WITH THEM WENT THE COURAGEOUS BUT DESPERATELY TIRED FIGHTER PILOTS OF THE R.A.F. WHO HAD FOUGHT SO STUBBORNLY SINCE THE WAR FIRST HAMMERED ON THE FRONTIERS OF GREECE.

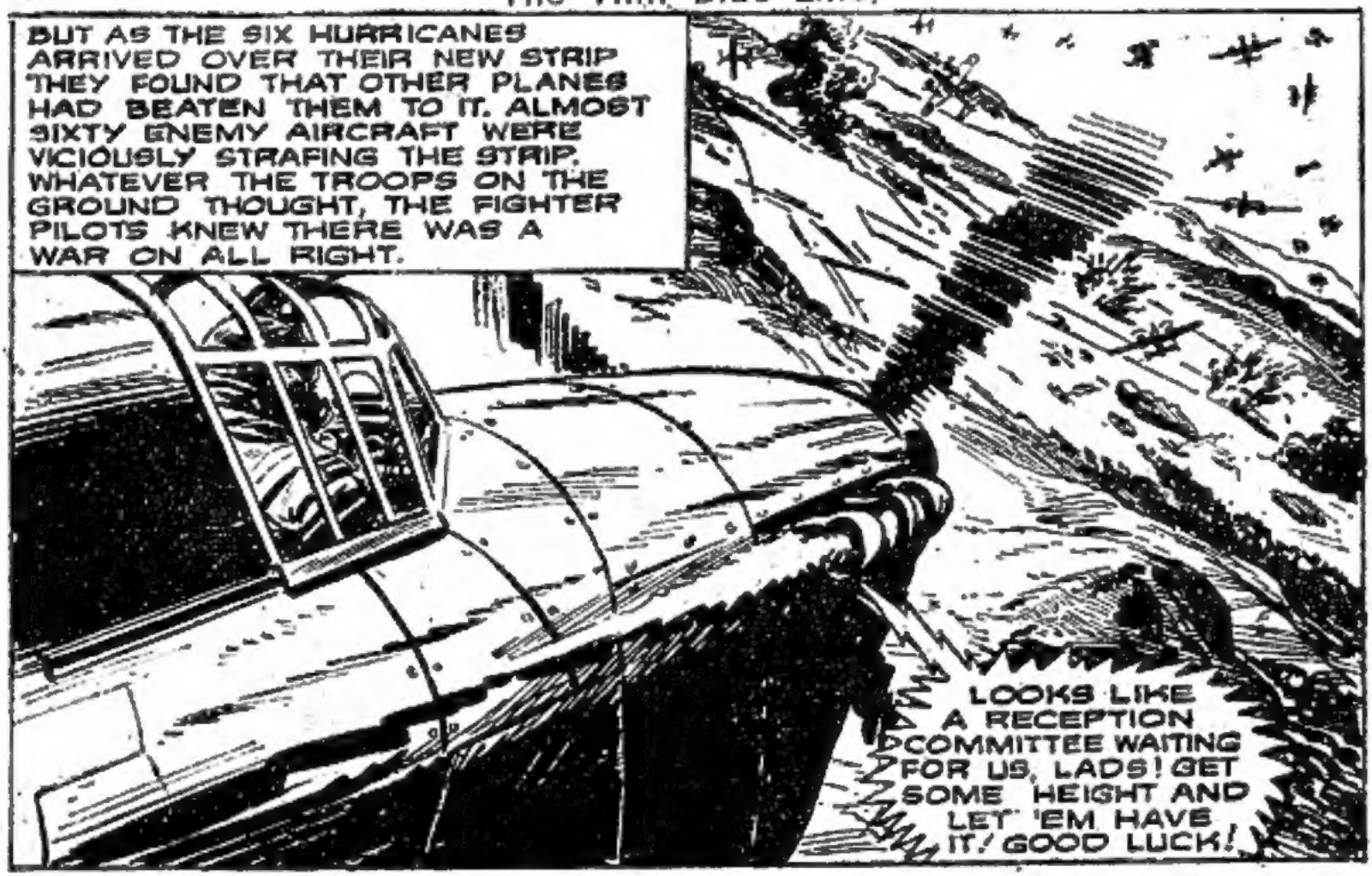
HANG ON, TOM! YOU'RE TAKING OFF AGAIN AS SOON AS YOU'RE REFUELLED! THERE'S A GENERAL RETREAT ON AND THIS AIRFIELD'S HAD IT! YOU'RE TO FLY TO AN AIRSTRIP SOUTH OF ARGOS... YOU'LL GET FURTHER ORDERS THERE!

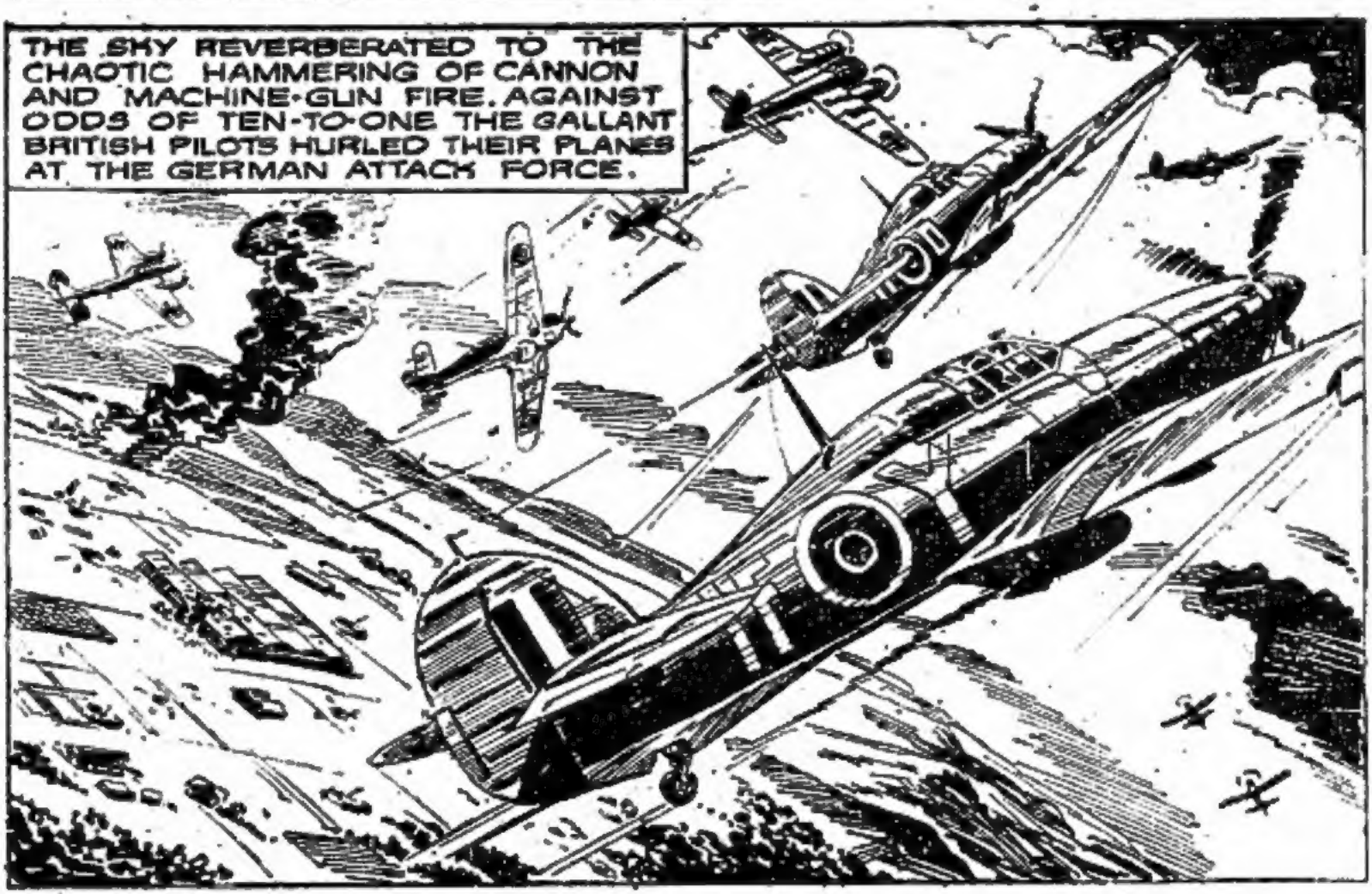
OLD JANE

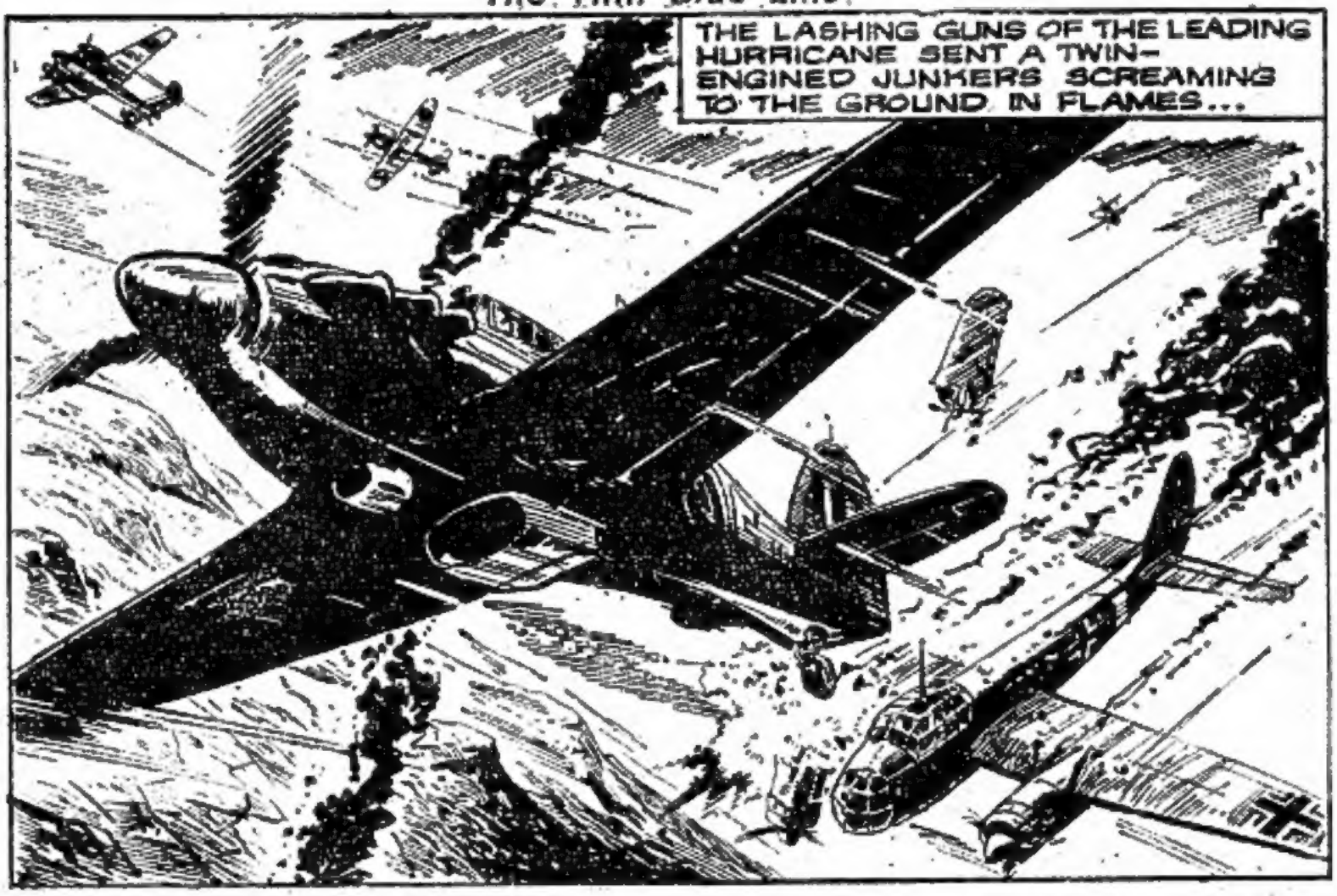
OH, NO! DON'T WE EVER GET ANY SHUT-EYE?

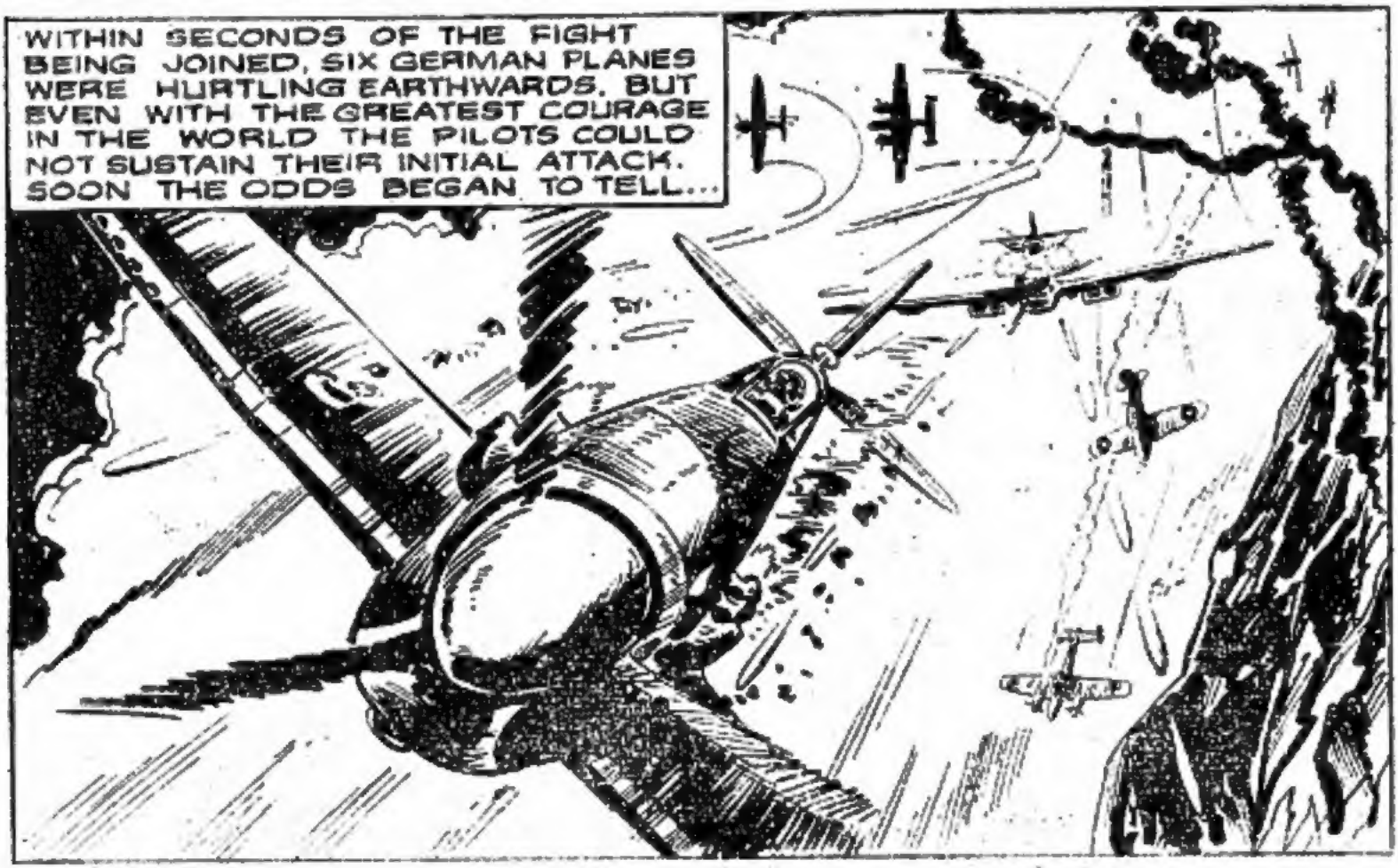
BUT SLEEP WAS A THING OF THE PAST FOR THE EXHAUSTED FIGHTER PILOTS, AND MINUTES LATER THEY WERE IN THE AIR AGAIN, URGING THEMSELVES AND THEIR BATTERED BUT VITALLY NEEDED AIRCRAFT SOUTHWARDS TO ANOTHER AIRFIELD, FROM WHERE THEY COULD RENEW THEIR ATTACKS ON THE ENEMY..

HEY, LOOK AT THAT LOT! FIVE MINUTES FLYING AND THEY'LL BE IN SAFETY... WHILE WE'VE GOT TO FIGHT THE PERISHING JERRIES EVERY INCH OF THE WAY! THOSE BLOKES DON'T KNOW THERE'S A WAR ON!


BUT AS THE SIX HURRICANES ARRIVED OVER THEIR NEW STRIP THEY FOUND THAT OTHER PLANES HAD BEATEN THEM TO IT. ALMOST SIXTY ENEMY AIRCRAFT WERE VICIOUSLY STRAFING THE STRIP. WHATEVER THE TROOPS ON THE GROUND THOUGHT, THE FIGHTER PILOTS KNEW THERE WAS A WAR ON ALL RIGHT.
LOOKS LIKE A RECEPTION COMMITTEE WAITING FOR US, LADS! GET SOME HEIGHT AND LET 'EM HAVE IT! GOOD LUCK!


THE SKY REVERBERATED TO THE CHAOTIC HAMMERING OF CANNON AND MACHINE-GUN FIRE. AGAINST ODDS OF TEN-TO-ONE THE GALLANT BRITISH PILOTS HURLED THEIR PLANES AT THE GERMAN ATTACK FORCE.


THE LASHING GUNS OF THE LEADING HURRICANE SENT A TWIN-ENGINED JUNKERS SCREAMING TO THE GROUND IN FLAMES...


WITHIN SECONDS OF THE FIGHT BEING JOINED, SIX GERMAN PLANES WERE HURTLING EARTHWARDS. BUT EVEN WITH THE GREATEST COURAGE IN THE WORLD THE PILOTS COULD NOT SUSTAIN THEIR INITIAL ATTACK. SOON THE ODDS BEGAN TO TELL...

THE OUTCOME OF THE FIGHT WAS INEVITABLE. THE SIX WAR-TORN HURRICANES, ALL THAT REMAINED OF A GALLANT SQUADRON, WERE GUNNED OUT OF THE CROWDED SKY. BUT EVEN IN ITS FINAL, UNCONTROLLED DEATH-DIVE, THE LAST HURRICANE STILL TOOK ITS TOLL!

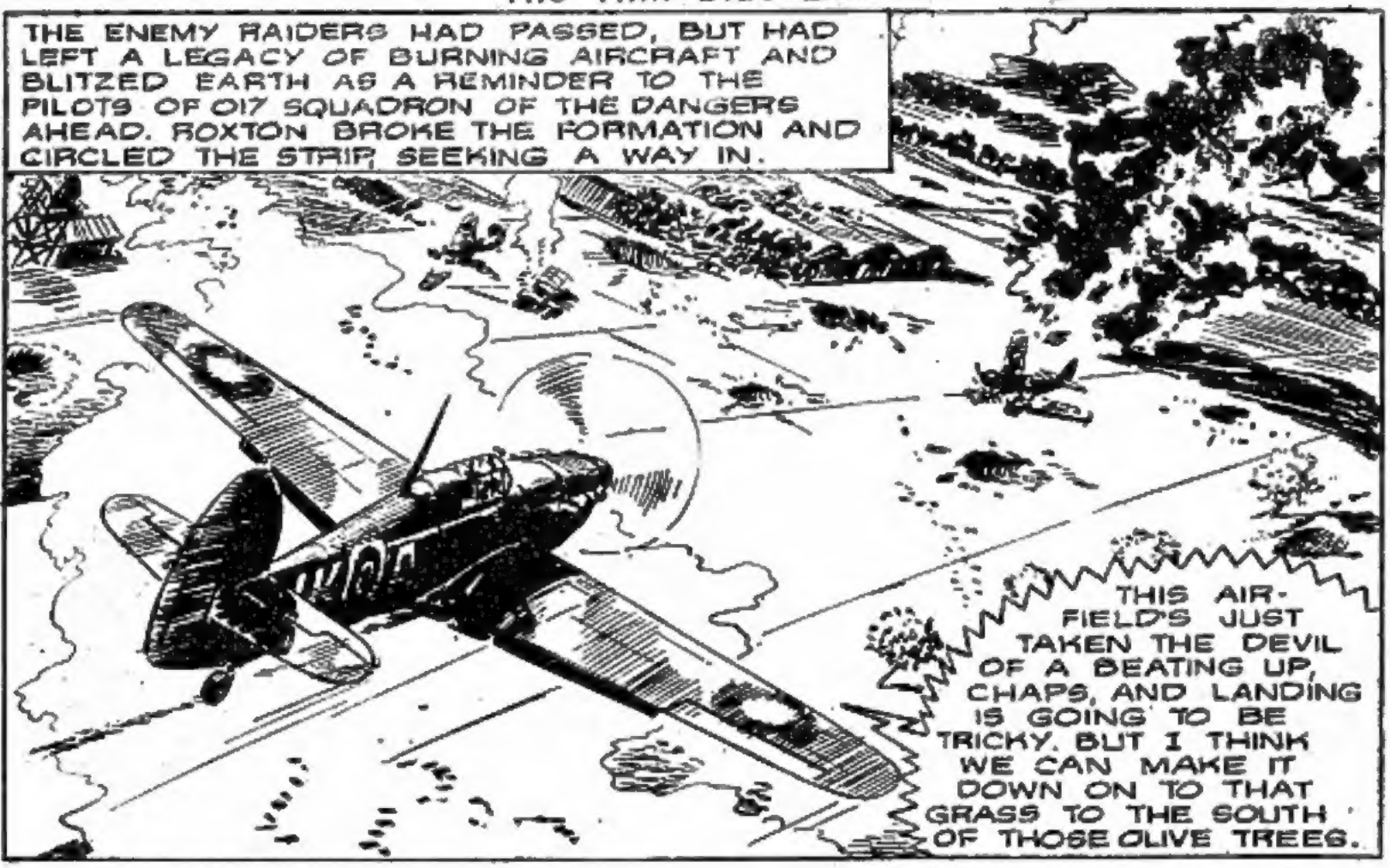
MEANWHILE, THE FIFTEEN HURRICANES OF 017 SQUADRON FLEW TOWARDS THIS CONFUSED, ONE-SIDED STRUGGLE THAT WAS THE WAR IN GREECE. TO THE MAJORITY OF THESE PILOTS THE SOUND OF BATTLE WAS YET TO BE HEARD, AND THEIR LIGHT-HEARTED BANTER MADE THE WAR SEEM VERY FAR AWAY.

STOP WOBBLING, ABOUT, JOHNNY, OR I'LL CHEW YOUR TAIL OFF!

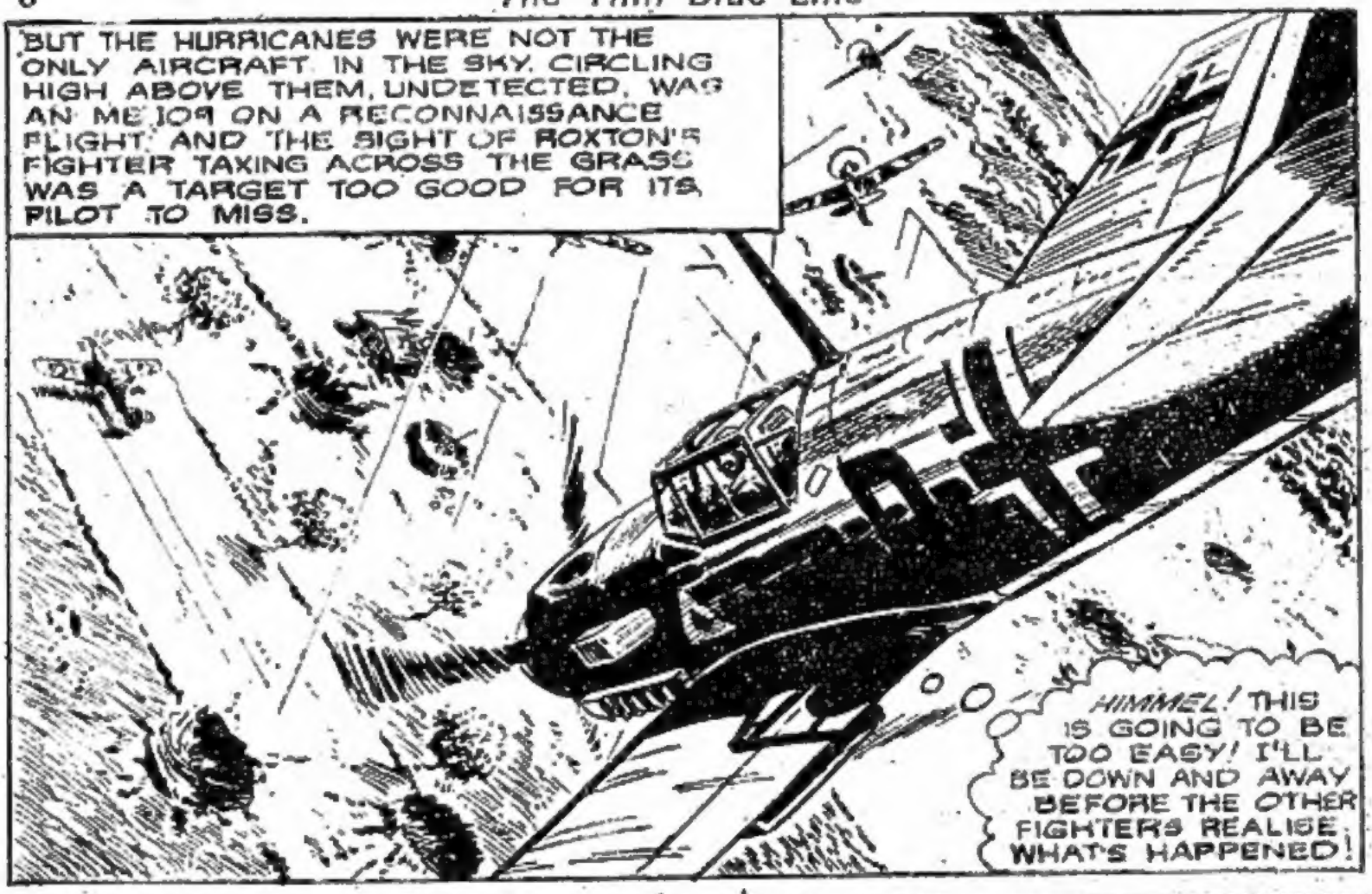
CUT THE CACKLE, BLUE SECTION, AND HOLD YOUR FORMATION! WE'LL BE LANDING PRETTY SOON!

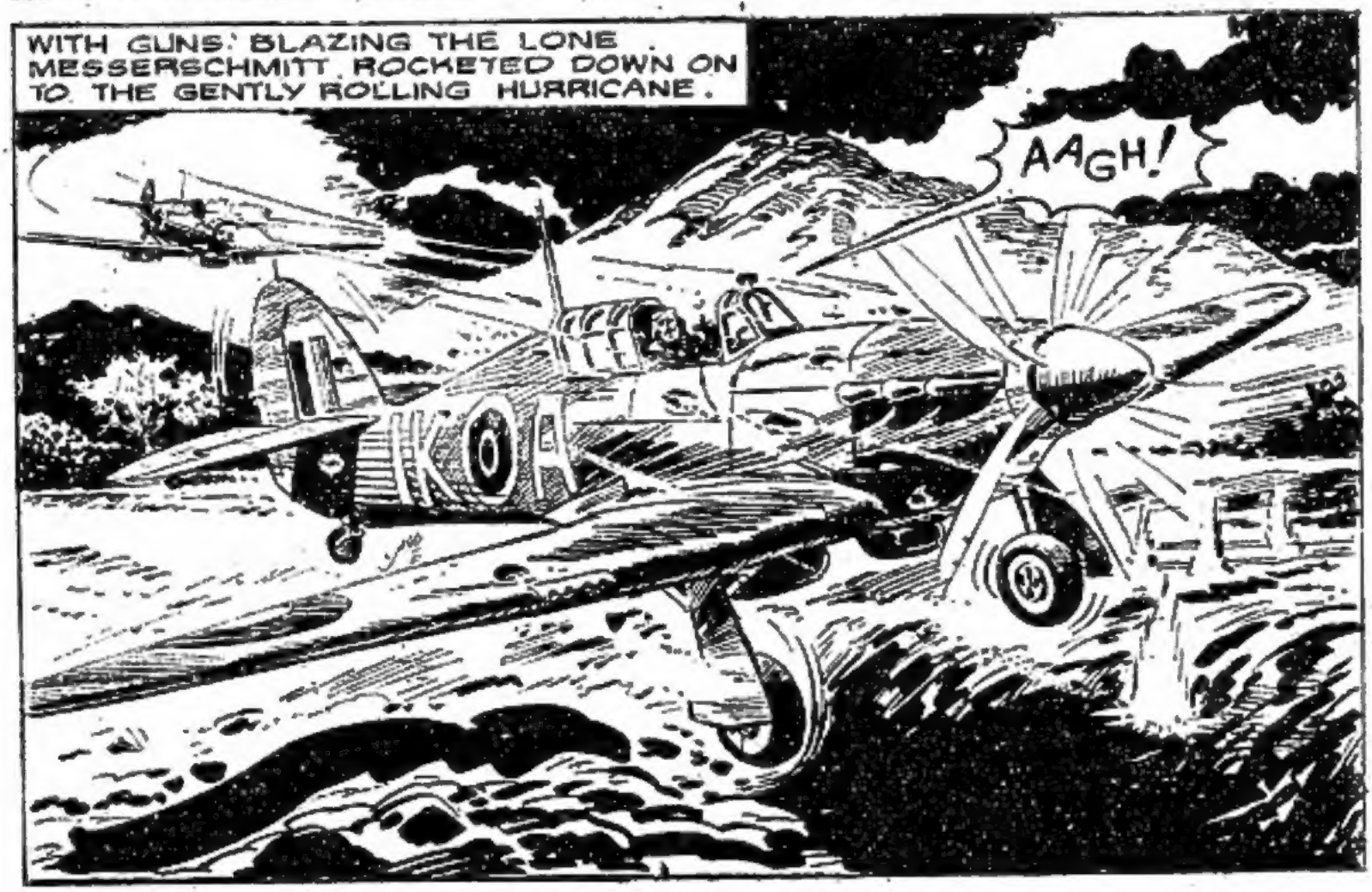
THE EXPERIENCED VOICE OF SQUADRON LEADER PAUL ROXTON SILENCED THE PILOTS. HE KNEW THAT THE NEARER THEY FLEW TOWARDS ARGOS THE NEARER THEY FLEW TOWARDS THE ENEMY... AND THE SQUADRON MUST NOW BE PREPARED FOR ANYTHING. BUT EVEN HE WAS NOT PREPARED FOR WHAT HE SAW AS HE DIVED THE SQUADRON DOWN OVER THE CRATERED STRIP TEN MINUTES LATER...

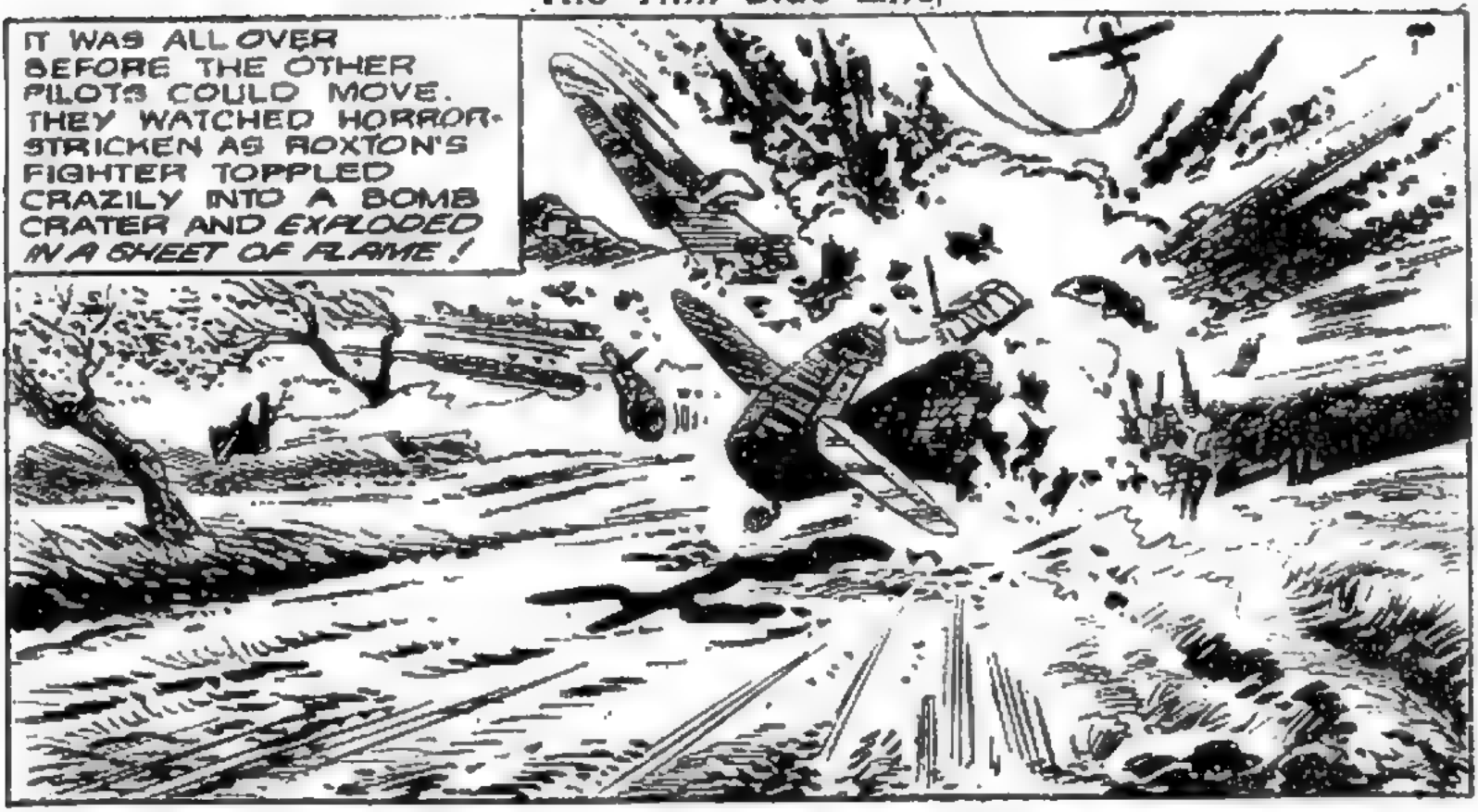
GOOD GRIEF! JERRY HAS CERTAINLY GIVEN THIS STRIP THE HAMMER! AND NOT SO LONG AGO BY THE LOOK OF IT!

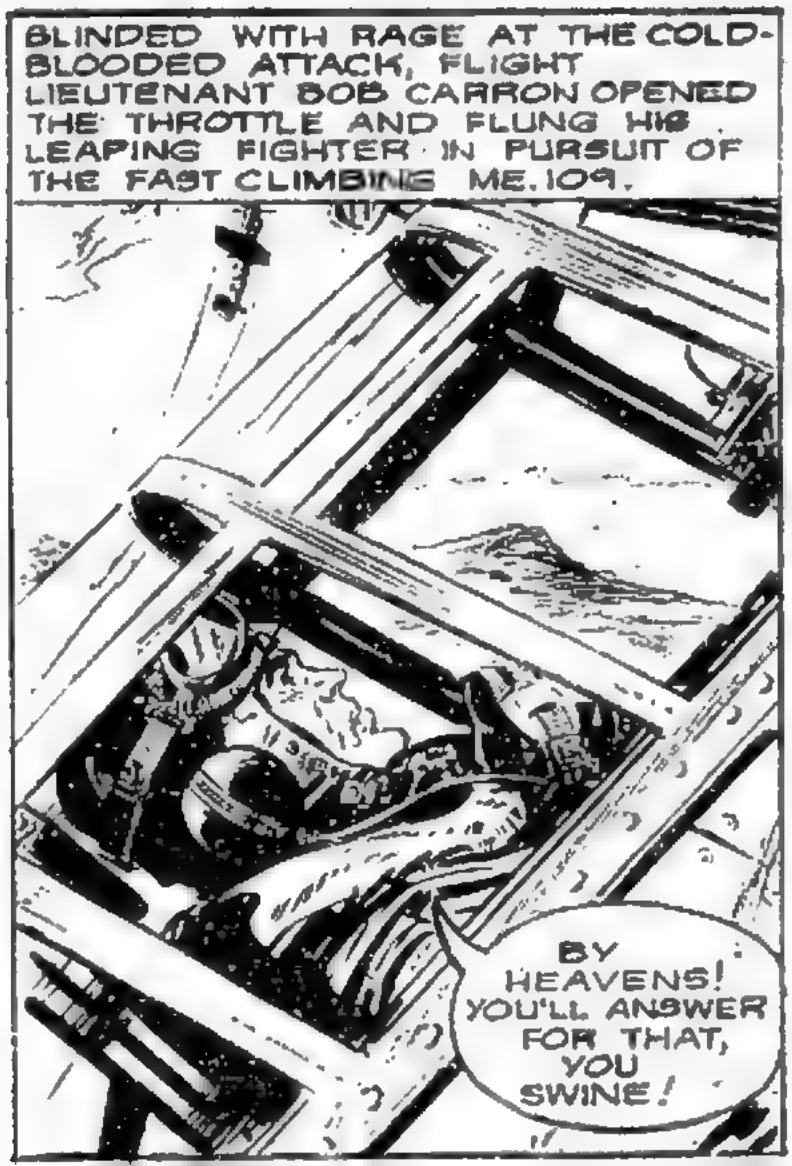

THE ENEMY RAIDERS HAD PASSED, BUT HAD LEFT A LEGACY OF BURNING AIRCRAFT AND BLITZED EARTH AS A REMINDER TO THE PILOTS OF 017 SQUADRON OF THE DANGERS AHEAD. ROXTON BROKE THE FORMATION AND CIRCLED THE STRIP, SEEKING A WAY IN.
THIS AIR-FIELD'S JUST TAKEN THE DEVIL OF A BEATING UP, CHAPS, AND LANDING IS GOING TO BE TRICKY. BUT I THINK WE CAN MAKE IT DOWN ON TO THAT GRASS TO THE SOUTH OF THOSE OLIVE TREES.

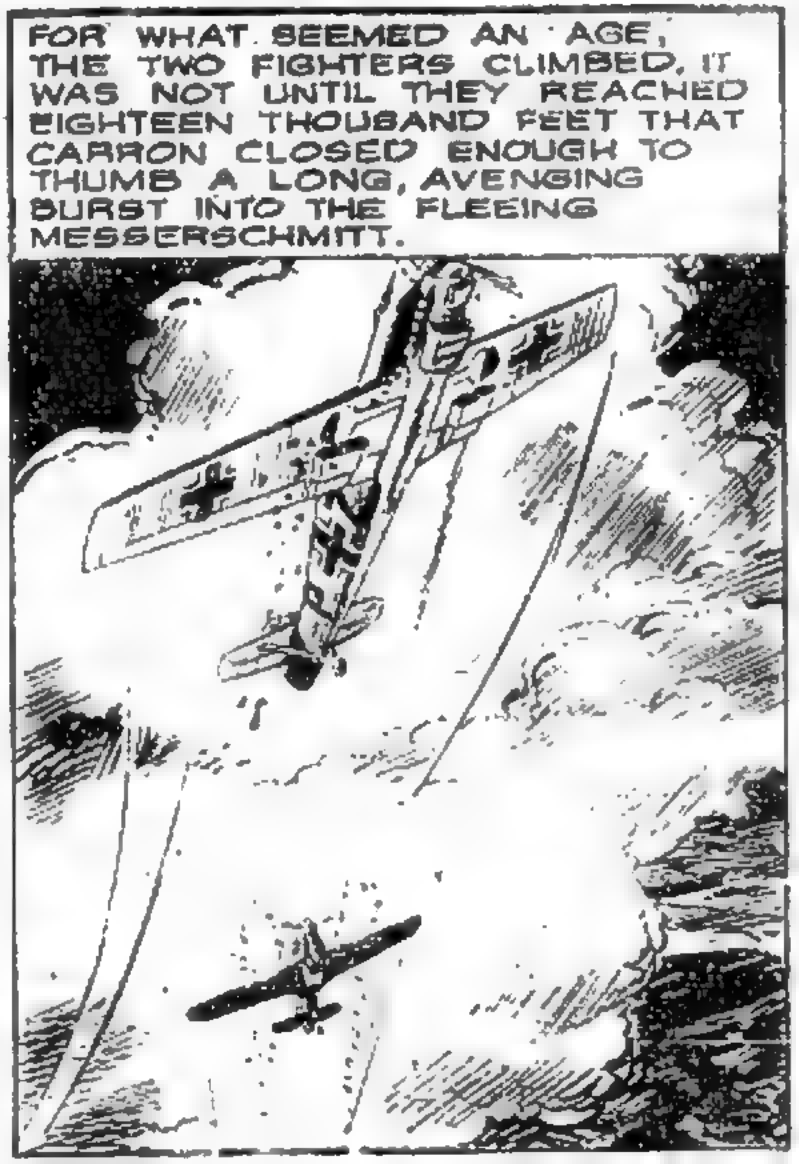
PICKING HIS SPOT CAREFULLY, ROXTON LOWERED HIS WHEELS AND BUMPED GENTLY DOWN ON TO THE GRASS BETWEEN TWO HUGE CRATERS...

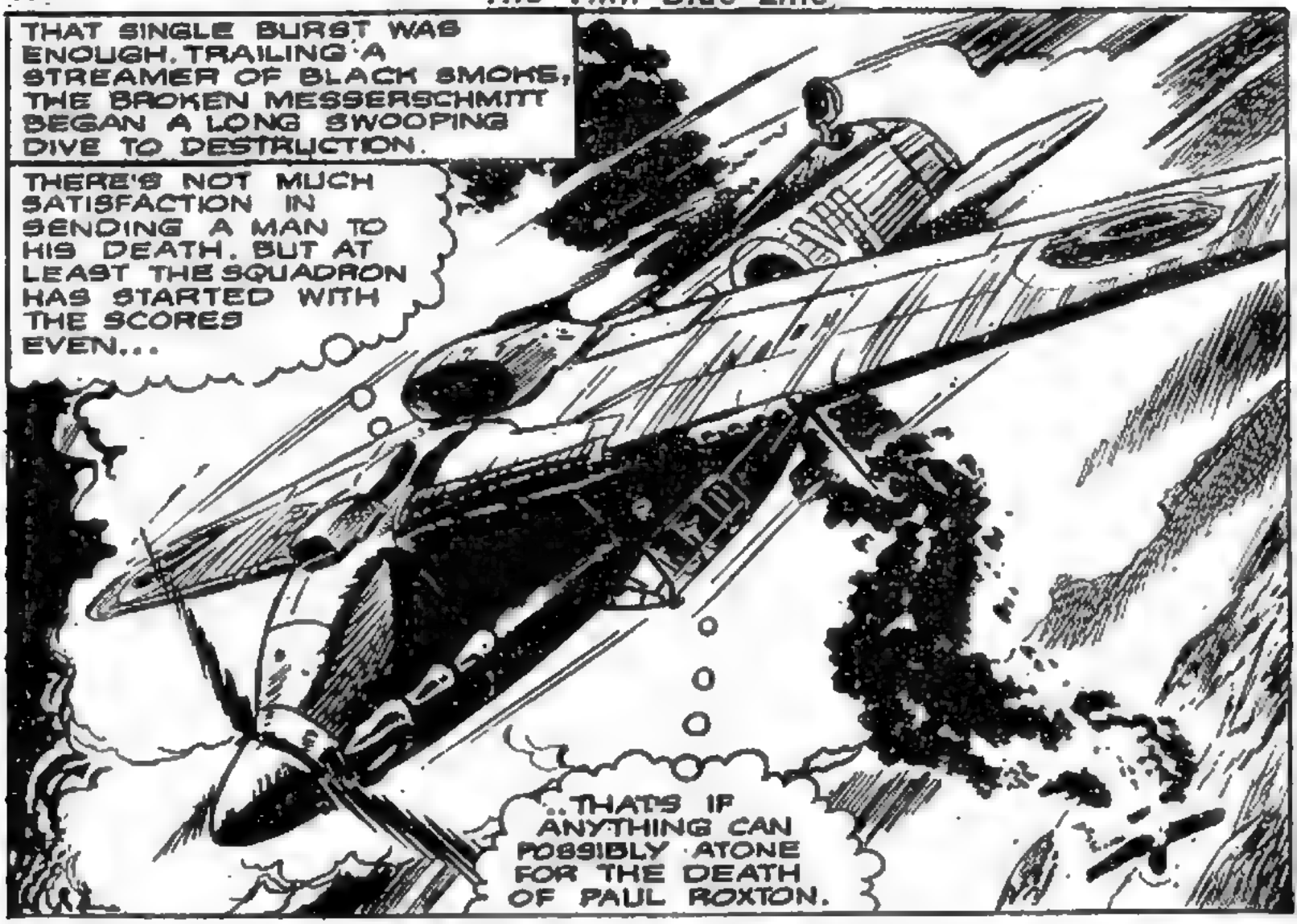

BUT THE HURRICANES WERE NOT THE ONLY AIRCRAFT IN THE SKY. CIRCLING HIGH ABOVE THEM, UNDETECTED, WAS AN ME 109 ON A RECONNAISSANCE FLIGHT. AND THE SIGHT OF ROXTON'S FIGHTER TAXING ACROSS THE GRASS WAS A TARGET TOO GOOD FOR ITS PILOT TO MISS.
HIMMEL! THIS IS GOING TO BE TOO EASY! I'LL BE DOWN AND AWAY BEFORE THE OTHER FIGHTERS REALISE WHAT'S HAPPENED!


WITH GUNS BLAZING THE LONE MESSERSCHMITT ROCKETED DOWN ON TO THE GENTLY ROLLING HURRICANE.
AAGH!


IT WAS ALL OVER BEFORE THE OTHER PILOTS COULD MOVE. THEY WATCHED HORROR-STRICKEN AS ROXTON'S FIGHTER TOPPLED CRAZILY INTO A BOMB CRATER AND EXPLODED IN A SHEET OF FLAME!


BLINDED WITH RAGE AT THE COLD-BLOODED ATTACK, FLIGHT LIEUTENANT BOB CARRON OPENED THE THROTTLE AND FLUNG HIS LEAPING FIGHTER IN PURSUIT OF THE FAST CLIMBING ME.109.
BY HEAVENS! YOU'LL ANSWER FOR THAT, YOU SWINE!


FOR WHAT SEEMED AN AGE, THE TWO FIGHTERS CLIMBED. IT WAS NOT UNTIL THEY REACHED EIGHTEEN THOUSAND FEET THAT CARRON CLOSED ENOUGH TO THUMB A LONG, AVENGING BURST INTO THE FLEEING MESSERSCHMITT.


THAT SINGLE BURST WAS ENOUGH. TRAILING A STREAMER OF BLACK SMOKE, THE BROKEN MESSERSCHMITT BEGAN A LONG SWOOPING DIVE TO DESTRUCTION.
THERE'S NOT MUCH SATISFACTION IN SENDING A MAN TO HIS DEATH. BUT AT LEAST THE SQUADRON HAS STARTED WITH THE SCORES EVEN...
...THAT'S IF ANYTHING CAN POSSIBLY ATONE FOR THE DEATH OF PAUL ROXTON.

TIGHT-LIPPED, CARRON HEADED BACK TOWARDS THE GUTTED STRIP. HE WAS NOW THE SENIOR OFFICER OF THE SQUADRON, YET, DESPITE HIS EXPERIENCE AND UNDOUBTED COURAGE IN THE FACE OF THE ENEMY, HE FELT STRANGELY INADEQUATE FOR THE JOB THAT AWAITED HIM ON THE GROUND.
WHAT A GHASTLY START FOR A NEW SQUADRON! ROXTON WAS LIKE A FATHER TO THEM... ALWAYS READY TO ADVISE AND GIVE A HAND. THEY'RE STILL AS GREEN AS GRASS.

CARRON FOUND GRIEF AND HORROR ENGRAVED ON EVERY FACE. HE WAS NOT A MAN WHO USUALLY THREW HIS RANK AROUND, BUT HE KNEW THAT FOR THEIR OWN SAKES HE WOULD HAVE TO TAKE A TOUGH LINE...

RIGHT, CHAPS! BETTER GET THE MACHINES OUT OF SIGHT IN CASE JERRY CALLS BACK. BUNNY, YOU COME WITH ME! WE'LL SEE IF ANYONE RUNNING THIS STATION IS STILL LEFT ALIVE.

BUT..?

NOT HALTING IN HIS STRIDE AND PAYING NO HEED TO THE MUMBLED EXCLAMATIONS OF PILOT OFFICER 'BUNNY' BURROWS WHO FOLLOWED QUICKLY IN HIS WAKE, CARRON HEADED DETERMINEDLY ACROSS THE FIELD TO A GROUP OF PARTLY DEMOLISHED HUTS.

BUT, BOB... WHAT ABOUT ROXTON? I MEAN.. IT HAPPENED SO QUICKLY.. THERE WAS NOTHING WE COULD DO. IT.. IT WAS HORRIBLE!

CARRON COULD NOT TRUST HIMSELF TO TURN BACK AND SPEAK. HE WAS NO MORE USED TO HAVING THE RESPONSIBILITY OF COMMAND THRUST SO VICIOUSLY UPON HIM ANY MORE THAN THE OTHERS WERE USED TO THE SUDDEN DEATH THEY HAD JUST WITNESSED.

BY HEAVEN! IF WE ALLOW ROXTON'S DEATH TO GET US DOWN THEN O-ONE-SEVEN SQUADRON WILL BE FINISHED BEFORE IT'S BEGUN...

THE SOONER WE GET SOME ORDERS FOR ACTION THE BETTER IT WILL BE FOR ALL OF US!

Chapter 2. TOUGH FUTURE

THE GERMAN RAID HAD REDUCED THE AIRSTRIP TO NEAR RUIN, AND NOT ONE SENIOR OFFICER, SAVE THE STATION DOCTOR, SQUADRON-LEADER HARRIS, REMAINED ALIVE. FORTUNATELY, THE SIGNALS TRUCK WAS INTACT AND CARRON WAS ABLE TO GET A MESSAGE TO GROUP H.Q..

HERE'S YOUR REPLY, SIR! WING COMMANDER CROMWELL WILL BE FLYING IN THIS EVENING TO TAKE COMMAND OF THE SQUADRON.

THANKS, CORPORAL!

DOC HARRIS LOOKED THOUGHTFUL AS CARRON RE-READ THE REPLY.

YOU SEEM RELIEVED, CARRON. I'D HAVE THOUGHT THAT YOU WOULD HAVE WANTED TO COMMAND THE SQUADRON YOURSELF!

NORMALLY I WOULD HAVE WANTED THE COMMAND, DOC. BUT NOW... I'M NOT SO SURE. THIS SQUADRON IS YOUNG AND INEXPERIENCED. THEY WOULD EXPECT ME TO BE ANOTHER ROXTON...

A RUEFUL SMILE CROSSED THE DOC'S FACE...

AS FOR YOUR PILOTS EXPECTING ANOTHER MAN LIKE ROXTON.. WELL, I KNOW JOE CROMWELL OF OLD! THEY'LL HAVE TO LEARN THAT ALL MEN ARE NOT CAST IN THE SAME MOULD.

ALL I HOPE IS THAT THEY LIVE LONG ENOUGH TO LEARN IT!

LATER THAT EVENING, AS THE WANING SUN LENGTHENED THE SHADOWS ACROSS THE STRIP, A LONE HURRICANE FLEW IN LOW OVER THE FLANKING HILLS. IT CIRCLED ONCE, LIKE A DOG SNIFFING A PIECE OF MEAT BEFORE EATING IT, AND THEN LOWERED ITS WHEELS AND CAME IN TO LAND.
HE CAN HANDLE A PLANE ALL RIGHT. LET'S HOPE HE CAN HANDLE MEN JUST AS WELL!

WING COMMANDER JOE CROMWELL ADVANCED PURPOSEFULLY TOWARDS CARRON. HIS WORDS WERE FORCEFUL AND TO THE POINT.
FLIGHT LIEUTENANT CARRON, SIR! GLAD TO HAVE YOU WITH US.
THAT'S WHAT THEY ALL SAY, CARRON! SOME HAVE LIVED, BUT MOST HAVE DIED REGRETTING THEY EVER SAID IT!

LEADING THE WAY ACROSS THE FIELD TOWARDS THE RESTING PILOTS, CARRON COULD NOT DECIDE WHETHER CROMWELL'S REMARKS PORTRAYED A WARPED SENSE OF HUMOUR OR WHETHER HE WAS SERIOUS. *HE SOON KNEW!*

YOU, MAN! WHAT'S YOUR NAME?

THE SHOCKED SERGEANT PILOT JUMPED TO HIS FEET.

W-WILCOX, SIR! SERGEANT PILOT WILCOX!

YOU MAY BE A SERGEANT, BUT IT REMAINS TO BE SEEN WHETHER YOU'RE A PILOT! DON'T YOU NORMALLY STAND *IMMEDIATELY* WHEN YOUR COMMANDING OFFICER HONOURS YOU WITH HIS PRESENCE?

SERGEANT 'BABE' WILCOX – SO NAMED BECAUSE HE WAS JUST NINETEEN AND THE YOUNGEST MEMBER OF THE SQUADRON – STOOD ASHEN-FACED BEFORE THE BURLY FIGURE OF HIS NEW C.O.

Y-YES, SIR!

THEN JUMP TO IT WHEN I'M AROUND! GET OUTSIDE WITH A SHOVEL AND DIG THOSE SLIT TRENCHES DEEPER! THEY'RE NOT BIG ENOUGH TO HOLD EVEN YOUR SCRAWNY BODY! *MOVE!*

WING COMMANDER JOE CROMWELL HAD LANDED WITH A BANG. HIS ARROGANT ATTACK ON THE TIMID YOUNG PILOT INSTANTLY BANISHED THE LISTLESS INDIFFERENCE BROUGHT ABOUT BY ROXTON'S DEATH. SMOULDERING RESENTMENT BURNED IN THE EYES OF EVERY MAN.

NOW, LISTEN TO ME! YOU MIGHT AS WELL KNOW FROM THE START THAT I OBJECTED TO COMING TO THIS NEW SQUADRON! I'M A FIGHTER PILOT... NOT A CONFOUNDED TEACHER! SO YOU'D BETTER UNDERSTAND FAST THAT WHEN I SAY SOMETHING I MEAN IT!

CROMWELL STRUTTED AMONG THE PILOTS LIKE A HAWK.

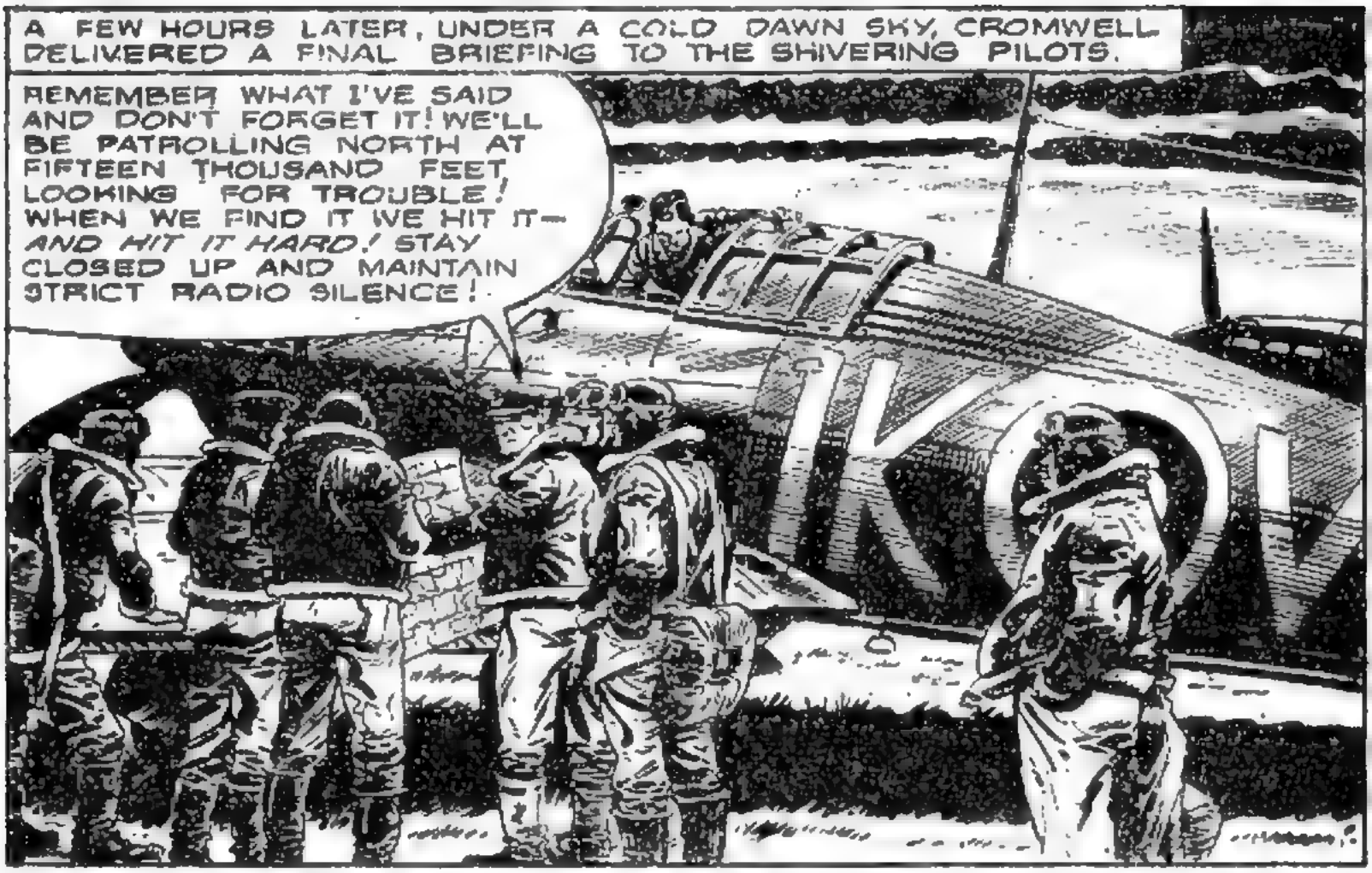
AT THIS VERY MOMENT PREPARATIONS ARE UNDER WAY FOR THE MASS EVACUATION OF ALL BRITISH FORCES IN GREECE! BUT DON'T GET THE IDEA THAT THE FIGHTING'S OVER.. AS FAR AS YOU'RE CONCERNED *IT'S ONLY JUST BEGUN!*

A SERIES OF REARGUARD ACTIONS ARE BEING FOUGHT. OUR JOB WILL BE CONFINED TO CLOSE SUPPORT OF THE TROOPS ENGAGED IN THESE ACTIONS. WHICH MEANS THAT AIR TO AIR ATTACK IS OUT... EXCEPT IN EMERGENCY SELF-DEFENCE!

CROMWELL'S GRIM WORDS HERALDED A TOUGH FUTURE FOR THE NEW SQUADRON.
COMMUNICATIONS BETWEEN US AND THE TROOPS ON THE GROUND ARE PRACTICALLY NON-EXISTENT. AND WITH THE GERMAN ADVANCE GAINING MOMENTUM EVERY HOUR, THERE'S NO TELLING WHERE THE FRONT LINE WILL BE AT ANY GIVEN TIME. SO, UNLESS WE RECEIVE SPECIFIC ORDERS FOR AN AIR-STRIKE, ALL OPERATIONS FROM THIS STATION WILL BE ON MY SAY-SO! UNDERSTOOD?

AND WHAT FUTURE THERE WAS LEFT TO THEM SEEMED LIKELY TO BE CUT VERY SHORT.
RIGHT! YOU'D BETTER GET WHAT SLEEP YOU CAN... BECAUSE ONCE WE START FLYING YOU WON'T GET MUCH CHANCE OF ANY MORE.. I'LL SEE TO THAT! BRIEFING WILL BE AT O-FOUR-THIRTY—AND THE LAST MAN TO ARRIVE WILL WISH HE'D NEVER BEEN BORN! THAT'S ALL!

AS CROMWELL DEPARTED, THE STORM BROKE...
I COULD HAVE BUSTED HIM BETWEEN THE EYES WHEN HE PICKED ON THE BABE LIKE THAT! THERE'S JUST NO COMPARISON BETWEEN HIM AND A MAN LIKE ROXTON! I'D LIKE TO...
CUT IT, BUNNY! I KNOW HOW YOU FEEL, BUT THREATENING YOUR C.O. WILL ONLY LEAD TO MORE TROUBLE NOW TURN IN! LET'S GET WHAT SLEEP WE CAN!


A FEW HOURS LATER, UNDER A COLD DAWN SKY, CROMWELL DELIVERED A FINAL BRIEFING TO THE SHIVERING PILOTS.
REMEMBER WHAT I'VE SAID AND DON'T FORGET IT! WE'LL BE PATROLLING NORTH AT FIFTEEN THOUSAND FEET, LOOKING FOR TROUBLE! WHEN WE FIND IT WE HIT IT— AND HIT IT HARD! STAY CLOSED UP AND MAINTAIN STRICT RADIO SILENCE!

IN THE UNREAL LIGHT OF THE EARLY MORNING, THE PILOTS DISPERSED TO THEIR MACHINES.
THE MAN'S CRAZY MAKING US TAKE OFF IN THIS LIGHT. YOU CAN'T TELL THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A SHADOW AND A CRATER!
CRAZY OR NOT, BUNNY, CROMWELL'S PREPARED TO RISK IT! IT'S UP TO US TO SHOW HIM THAT WE CAN FLY JUST AS WELL AS HE CAN!

WITH ENGINES REVVED TO FULL PITCH, FIFTEEN HURRICANES SPED PRECARIOUSLY OVER THAT TREACHEROUS STRIP AND SOARED INTO THE AIR. DOC HARRIS AND FLIGHT SERGEANT BOWMAN, THE FITTER, WATCHED THEM GO...

THAT'S THE FIRST TIME MOST OF THEM HAVE FLOWN INTO ACTION, FLIGHT. GOODNESS KNOWS WHAT CROMWELL WILL LEAD 'EM INTO, BUT WHATEVER IT IS, YOU CAN BET YOUR LIFE IT'LL BE TOUGH!

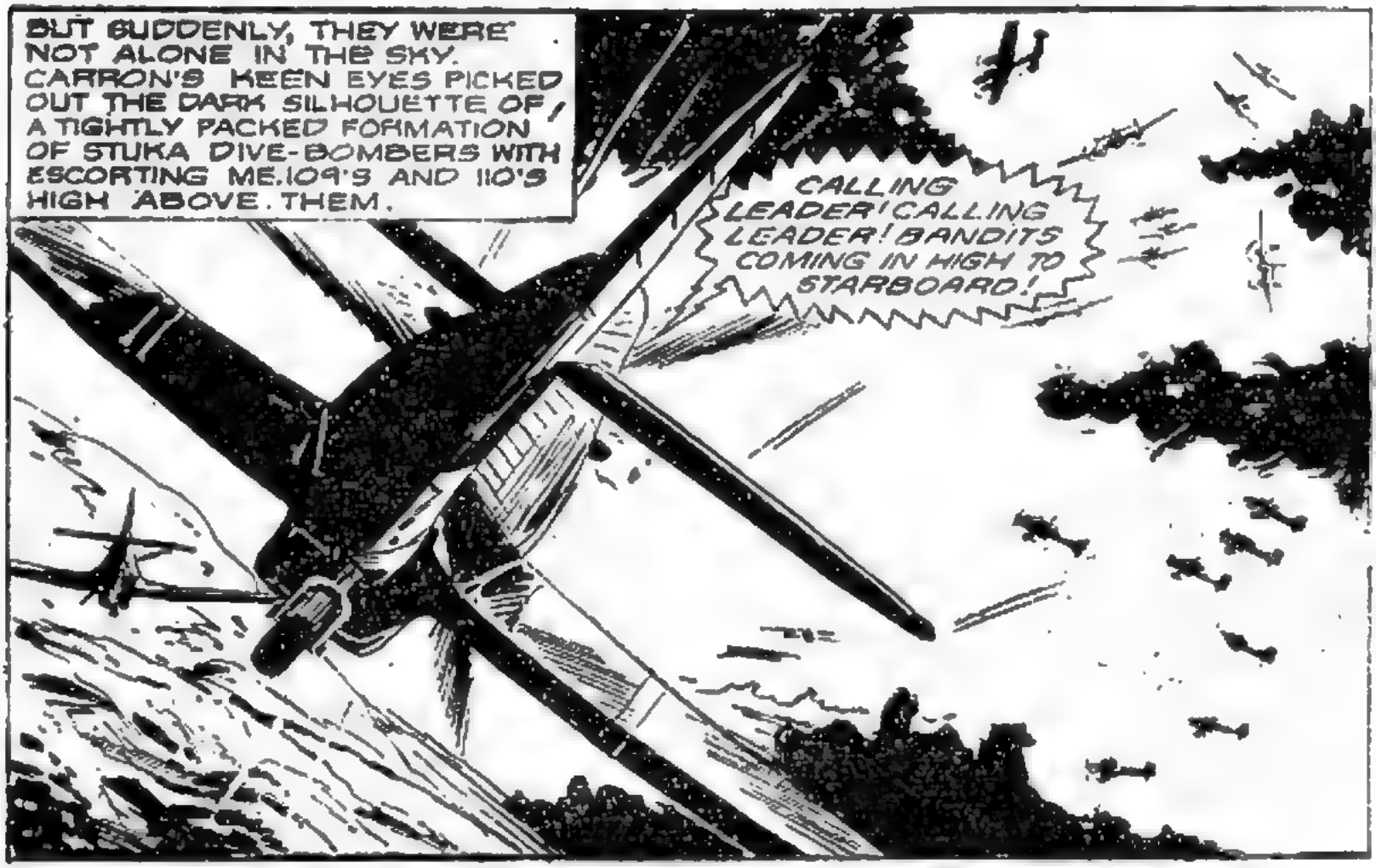
HIGH IN THE BRIGHTENING SKY THEY FLEW. PASSING THE ENDLESS COLUMNS OF MEN AND VEHICLES RETREATING SOUTHWARDS. OVER-TURNED TRUCKS AND CARRIERS LAY BURNING BY THE ROADSIDE .. A GRIM REMINDER THAT THE LUFTWAFFE WAS NEVER FAR AWAY.

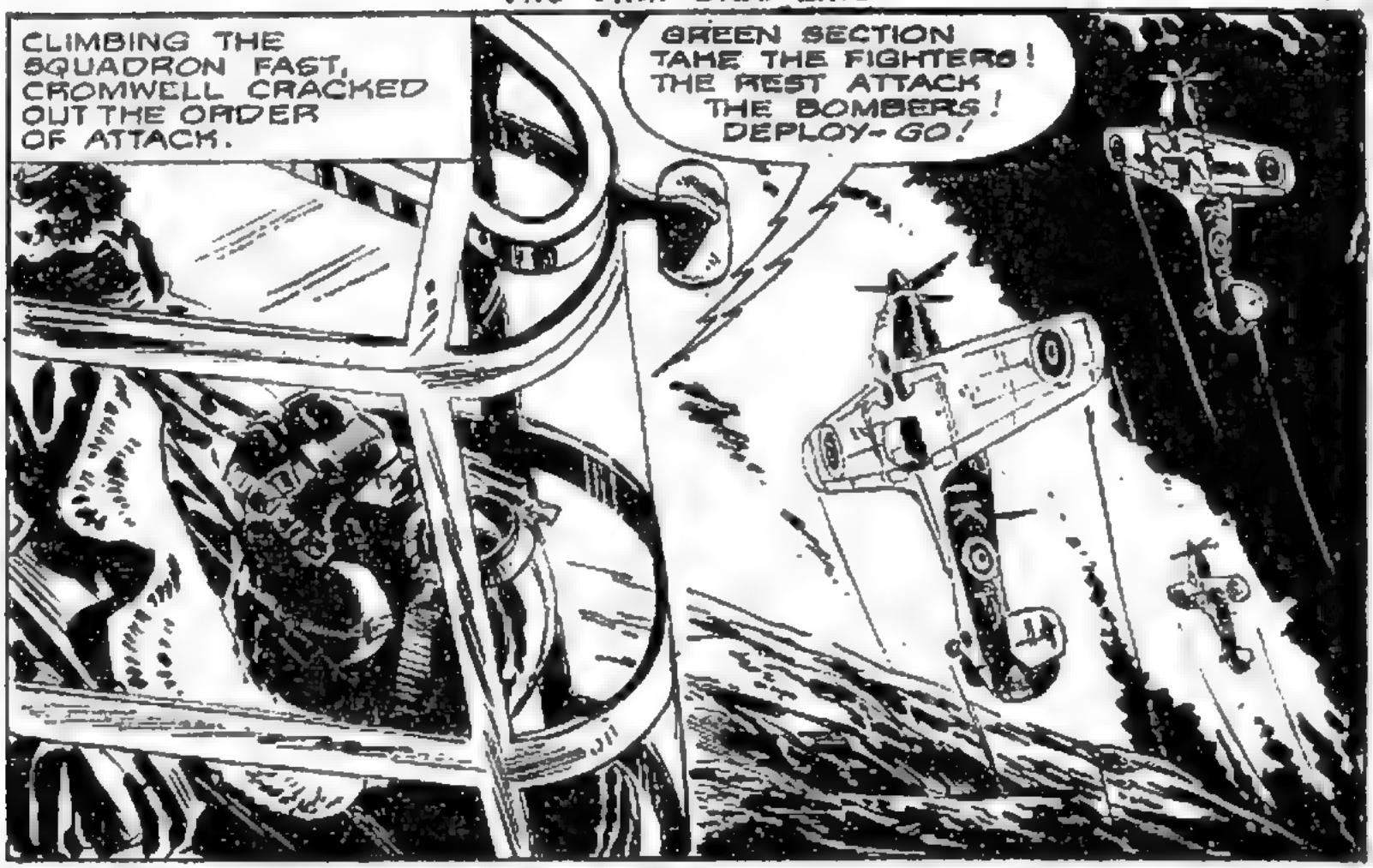
GO ON, MY LUCKY LADS! GIVE 'EM ONE FOR US!

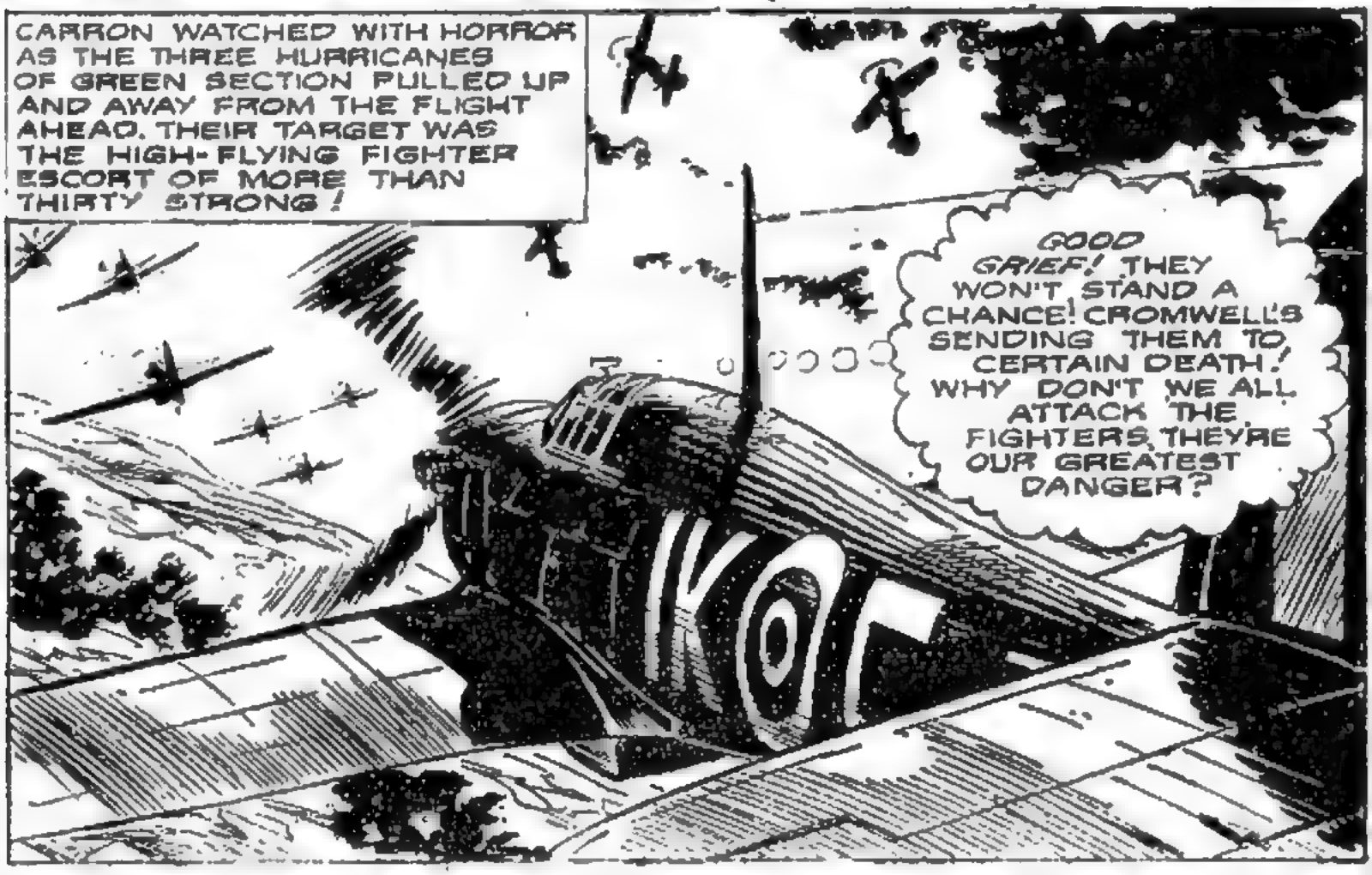
MINUTES LATER, INDISTINCT PUFFS OF SMOKE ON THE GROUND GAVE WARNING THAT THE BATTLE WAS NEAR AT HAND.

TANKS! MASSES OF THEM! *PHEW!* I WOULDN'T LIKE TO BE DOWN THERE IN THE PATH OF THAT LOT!

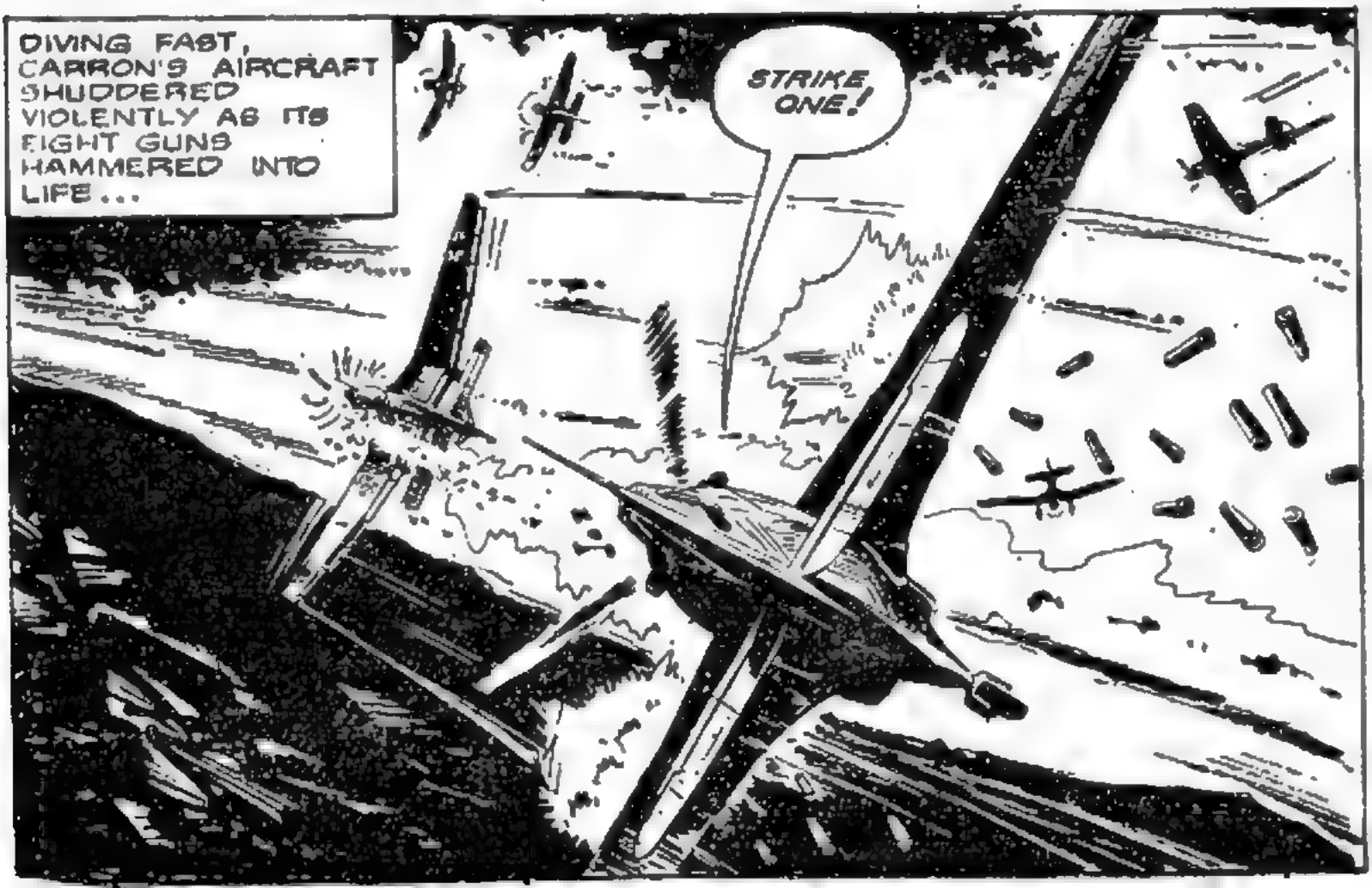
CROMWELL SWUNG THE SQUADRON ROUND IN A TIGHT TURN OVER THE BATTLEFIELD AND BEGAN TO LOSE HEIGHT.
RIGHT! THERE'S OUR TARGET! OUR TROOPS ARE CATCHING A PACKET FROM THAT LOT... LET'S GIVE 'EM A HAND!

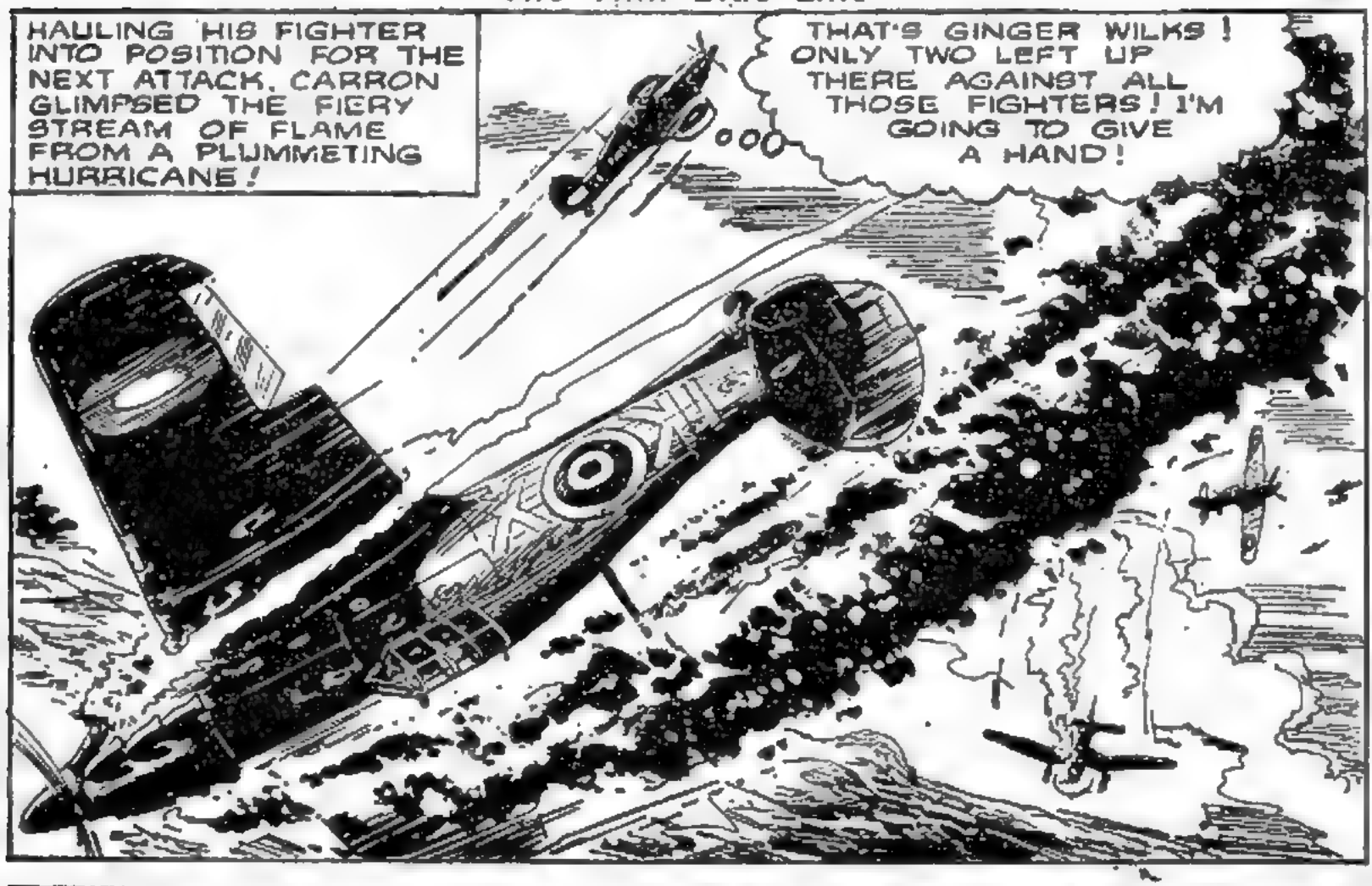

BUT SUDDENLY, THEY WERE NOT ALONE IN THE SKY. CARRON'S KEEN EYES PICKED OUT THE DARK SILHOUETTE OF A TIGHTLY PACKED FORMATION OF STUKA DIVE-BOMBERS WITH ESCORTING ME.109'S AND 110'S HIGH ABOVE THEM.
CALLING LEADER! CALLING LEADER! BANDITS COMING IN HIGH TO STARBOARD!

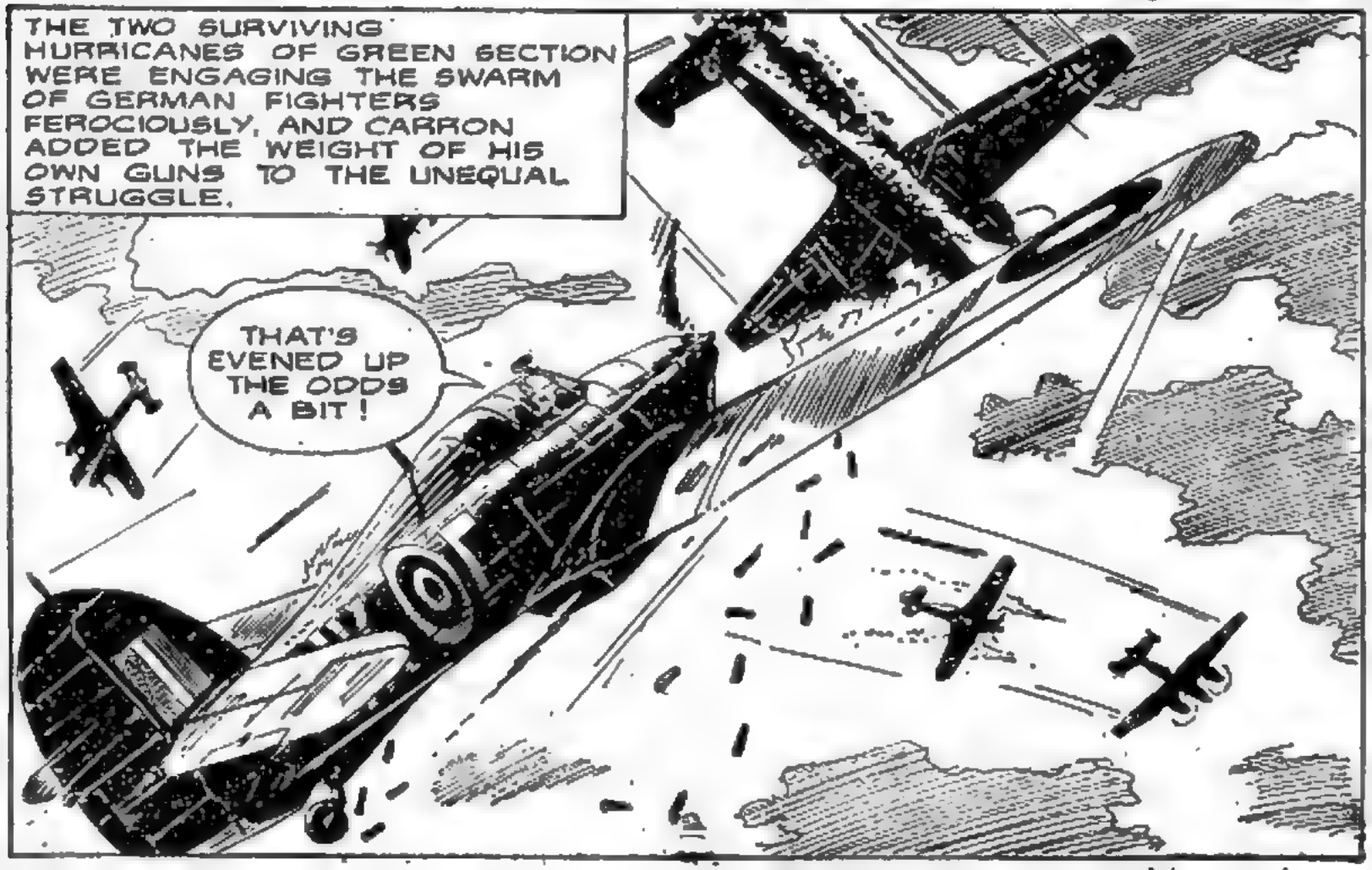

CLIMBING THE SQUADRON FAST, CROMWELL CRACKED OUT THE ORDER OF ATTACK.
GREEN SECTION TAKE THE FIGHTERS! THE REST ATTACK THE BOMBERS! DEPLOY- GO!


CARRON WATCHED WITH HORROR AS THE THREE HURRICANES OF GREEN SECTION PULLED UP AND AWAY FROM THE FLIGHT AHEAD. THEIR TARGET WAS THE HIGH-FLYING FIGHTER ESCORT OF MORE THAN THIRTY STRONG!
GOOD GRIEF! THEY WON'T STAND A CHANCE! CROMWELL'S SENDING THEM TO CERTAIN DEATH! WHY DON'T WE ALL ATTACK THE FIGHTERS, THEY'RE OUR GREATEST DANGER?

BUT CARRON HAD NO MORE TIME TO THINK OF THE DANGER THAT THREATENED HIS COMRADES. THE SCREAMING STUKAS WERE ALREADY PEELING OFF...
IF OUR FIGHTERS DON'T GET THOSE STUKAS QUICKLY, WE'RE DEAD DUCKS!


DIVING FAST, CARRON'S AIRCRAFT SHUDDERED VIOLENTLY AS ITS FIGHT GUNS HAMMERED INTO LIFE...
STRIKE ONE!


HAULING HIS FIGHTER INTO POSITION FOR THE NEXT ATTACK, CARRON GLIMPSED THE FIERY STREAM OF FLAME FROM A PLUMMETING HURRICANE!
THAT'S GINGER WILKS! ONLY TWO LEFT UP THERE AGAINST ALL THOSE FIGHTERS! I'M GOING TO GIVE A HAND!


THE TWO SURVIVING HURRICANES OF GREEN SECTION WERE ENGAGING THE SWARM OF GERMAN FIGHTERS FEROCIOUSLY, AND CARRON ADDED THE WEIGHT OF HIS OWN GUNS TO THE UNEQUAL STRUGGLE.
THAT'S EVENED UP THE ODDS A BIT!

BELOW THE RAGING DOG-FIGHT, CROMWELL AND THE MAIN FORMATION OF HURRICANES SAVAGED THE DEADLY STUKAS MERCILESSLY. THOSE THAT SURVIVED WERE SOON GLAD TO SCUTTLE FOR SAFETY.
VITAL RESPITE HAD BEEN WON FOR THE TROOPS ON THE GROUND.

BUT 017 SQUADRON PAID FOR THEIR SUCCESS. DESPITE CARRON'S INTERVENTION, THE TWO REMAINING HURRICANES OF GREEN SECTION WERE SHOT FROM THE SKY.
THEY NEVER STOOD A CHANCE! IF THIS IS CROMWELL'S IDEA OF FIGHTING, THEN WE'RE ALL DUE FOR AN EARLY GRAVE!

CARRON'S FIGHTER WAS BADLY SHOT UP, AND HE WAS THE LAST TO RETURN TO BASE. CROMWELL MET HIM, HIS FACE RED WITH FURY.
CARRON! I SAID ATTACK THE DIVE BOMBERS... AND I MEANT IT! IF YOU GO FLYING OFF AGAIN PLAYING THE HERO I'LL HAVE YOU STRIPPED SO FAST YOU'LL THINK THE WORLD HAS COME TO AN END!

EYES BLAZING, CARRON ANSWERED BACK...
FOR THREE GOOD PILOTS THE WORLD HAS COME TO AN END ALL RIGHT! IF WE'D ATTACKED THOSE GERMAN FIGHTERS AT FULL STRENGTH, THEY MIGHT WELL HAVE BEEN ALIVE NOW!

CROMWELL'S LIP CURLED IN AN UGLY SNEER... IT WAS ALMOST AS IF HE ENJOYED WATCHING CARRON WRITHE WITH FRUSTRATED ANGER.
GREEN SECTION KEPT THE FIGHTERS OFF OUR NECKS JUST LONG ENOUGH FOR US TO KNOCK DOWN THOSE ENEMY BOMBERS! IF THEY GOT KILLED DOING IT, THEN THEY WERE UNLUCKY! BUT THEY WERE OBEYING ORDERS!

HATE-FILLED STARES BURNED INTO CROMWELL'S BACK AS HE TURNED AND STRODE AWAY.
UNLUCKY! HE DETAILS MEN TO DO A SUICIDE JOB AND WHEN THEY GET KILLED HE SAYS THEY WERE UNLUCKY!
I THINK YOU CHAPS ARE MISSING AN IMPORTANT POINT!

HEADS TURNED IN SURPRISE AT DOC HARRIS' QUIET INTERVENTION.
IF THE WHOLE SQUADRON HAD GONE FOR THE FIGHTERS, WOULDN'T THE TROOPS ON THE GROUND HAVE BEEN A DARN SIGHT MORE UNLUCKY? THOSE STUKAS DON'T MISS VERY OFTEN, YOU KNOW. AND YOUR PRIMARY PURPOSE IS, I BELIEVE, CLOSE GROUND SUPPORT...
I SUPPOSE YOU'RE RIGHT, DOC. BUT IT SEEMS THAT CROMWELL'S IDEA OF OUR PRIMARY PURPOSE INCLUDES GETTING US ALL KILLED!

Chapter 3. COMMAND of HATE

HITLER HAD ORDERED THAT THERE WAS TO BE NO SECOND 'DUNKIRK' IN GREECE. A MOBILE BATTERY OF HEAVY GUNS WAS BACKING UP THAT ORDER...
FEUER!
NEWS OF THE EFFECT OF THE SHELLING WAS RECEIVED AT ARMY BRIGADE H.Q. WITH CONSTERNATION...
WE'VE GOT TO DO SOMETHING OR PRETTY SOON THERE WON'T BE A MAN LEFT ALIVE ON THAT ROAD! THERE WON'T EVEN BE A ROAD! TRY TO CONTACT R.A.F. H.Q. AGAIN - BY DISPATCH-RIDER, IF NECESSARY. BUT THEY MUST BE FOUND.. AND QUICK! A FEW, WELL-AIMED BOMBS IS OUR ONLY HOPE!

BUT THE BRIGADIER WAS OUT OF TOUCH WITH EVENTS. ALL RAF BOMBERS HAD BEEN WITHDRAWN FROM GREECE DAYS BEFORE. ONLY A FEW DEPLETED FIGHTER SQUADRONS REMAINED... AND EVEN THEY WOULD NOT REMAIN FOR LONG.
A SIGNAL'S JUST COME IN FOR ALL FIGHTER SQUADRONS TO PULL OUT TO CRETE. WE'RE TO COVER THE EVACUATION FROM THERE. THAT ORDER SHOULD PLEASE THE C.O.S...! ESPECIALLY CROMWELL!
YES, SIR. HE'S BEEN JAMMING OUR LINES FOR DAYS REQUESTING PERMISSION TO GET OUT! THINGS HAVE BEEN PRETTY TOUGH IN HIS SECTOR!

TOUGH WAS INDEED THE WORD. 017 SQUADRON HAD JUST RETURNED FROM AN ATTACK ON AN ENEMY SUPPLY COLUMN AND THE LUFTWAFFE HAD AGAIN TAKEN ITS TOLL.. FOUR PILOTS KILLED, TWO WOUNDED.
AT THIS RATE WE'RE ALL DUE FOR THE CHOP IN A COUPLE OF DAYS. CROMWELL MUST CHANGE HIS TACTICS!
YOU NOTICE HE NEVER LEADS THE ATTACKS ON THE FIGHTERS HIMSELF, BUNNY!... ALWAYS SENDS OTHERS TO THEIR DEATHS FIRST!

THE BATTERED HURRICANES WERE MANHANDLED UNDER THE LEE OF A HIGH, ROCK WALL FOR REFUELLING AND HASTY REPAIRS. CROMWELL'S TONGUE LASHED FLIGHT-SERGEANT BOWMAN AND HIS GROUND CREW JUST AS RELENTLESSLY AS HE DROVE THE PILOTS IN THE AIR.
GET CRACKING, BOWMAN! WE'RE TAKING OFF AGAIN IN FIFTEEN MINUTES!

BUT THERE WAS TO BE NO TAKING OFF!
ENEMY DIVE-BOMBERS APPROACHING! TAKE COVER!
BLAZES! THEY'VE CAUGHT US ON THE GROUND WITHOUT FUEL AND AMMUNITION! THEY'LL PAY FOR THAT!

AT THAT MOMENT CROMWELL'S THREAT SEEMED UTTERLY FUTILE, FOR THE TRUMP CARD OF A SURPRISE ATTACK WAS BEING RUTHLESSLY PLAYED BY THE GERMANS...

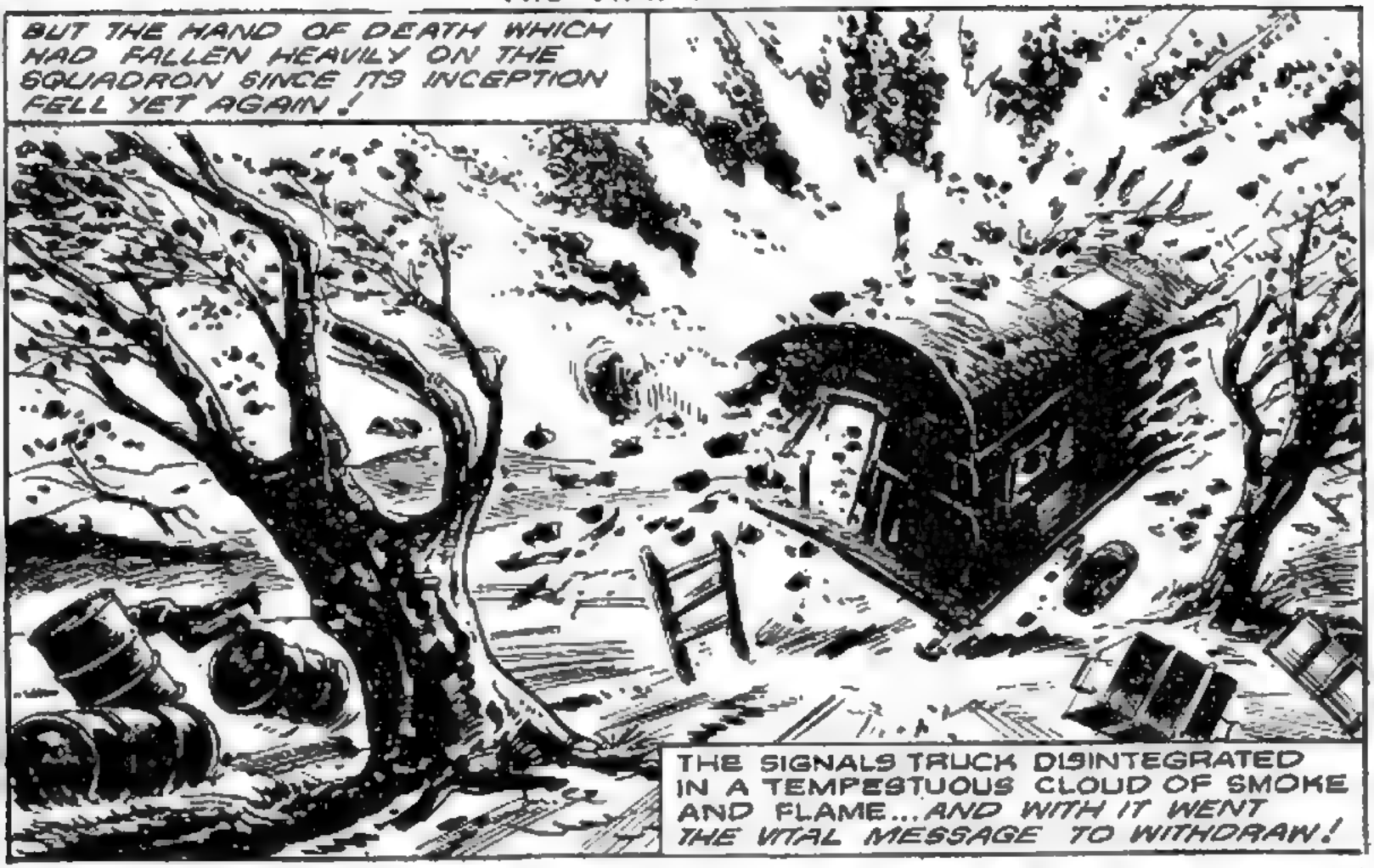
BUT EVEN THOUGH CAUGHT ON THE GROUND, THE SURVIVING FLYERS THOUGHT ONLY OF HITTING BACK...
C'MON, BUNNY! THOSE GUNNERS HAVE BEEN HIT BY THE BLAST! LET'S GET THAT GUN BACK INTO ACTION!

RIGHTING THE FALLEN BREN, CARRON RIPPED HOME A SAVAGE BURST INTO A SCREAMING STUKA AS IT CAME OUT OF ITS DIVE.

CARRON SWUNG THE GUN ON TO HIS NEXT TARGET. BUT SUDDENLY, HIS ATTENTION WAS SWITCHED TOWARDS A FIGURE POUNDING ACROSS THE CRATER-SCARRED FIELD.
LOOK! IT'S CROMWELL! THE MAN'S COMPLETELY MAD! THEY'LL GET HIM FOR SURE OUT IN THE OPEN LIKE THAT!

THE HIGH-PITCHED ROAR OF A STUKA... THE SUDDEN, SHORT-LIVED SCREAM OF A BOMB..AND CROMWELL DISAPPEARED IN A MASS OF ERUPTING EARTH...
THEY'VE GOT HIM! CROMWELL'S BEEN HIT!

AMIDST THAT INCREDIBLE DIN OF GUNFIRE AND EXPLODING BOMBS, A MESSAGE WAS RECEIVED BY THE SIGNALS CORPORAL, WHO HAD STUCK GALLANTLY AT HIS RADIO SET.
AND ABOUT TIME, TOO! MESSAGE RECEIVED AND UNDERSTOOD! ROGER AND OUT!
R.A.F.
FROM: Group H.Q. TO: All Squadrons
PRIORITY IMMEDIATE!
All Operational Aircraft to be withdrawn from Greek Mainland to Crete Island Immediately. All U/S Aircraft and equipment to be destroyed.
By Order of Air Officer Commanding.


BUT THE HAND OF DEATH WHICH HAD FALLEN HEAVILY ON THE SQUADRON SINCE ITS INCEPTION FELL YET AGAIN!
THE SIGNALS TRUCK DISINTEGRATED IN A TEMPESTUOUS CLOUD OF SMOKE AND FLAME...AND WITH IT WENT THE VITAL MESSAGE TO WITHDRAW!

ANOTHER MAN WHO STUCK GALLANTLY TO HIS POST WAS THE DOC. FOR, WHEN THE RAIDERS HAD PASSED, THERE WOULD BE MUCH WORK TO BE DONE...
FIX ME UP, WILL YOU, DOC? I'VE GOT TO GET INTO THE AIR AS SOON AS THIS RAID'S OVER!
GREAT SCOTT! HERE...! SIT DOWN, MAN! YOU DON'T LOOK AS IF YOU'RE FIT ENOUGH TO GO ANYWHERE OTHER THAN THE HOSPITAL TO ME!
BY A MIRACLE, CROMWELL HAD SURVIVED THE BLAST OF A NEAR HIT!

BUT HE HAD NOT ESCAPED UNSCATHED. BEADS OF PERSPIRATION DOTTED HIS FOREHEAD AS THE DOC'S PRIMITIVE SURGERY PROBED A BOMB SPLINTER FROM HIS SHOULDER...
GOT IT! BUT THAT'S FINISHED YOU WITH FLYING FOR A WHILE, I'M AFRAID...
....WE MUST GET YOU TO THE BASE HOSPITAL, IF IT STILL EXISTS, TO GET THIS WOUND PROPERLY STERILIZED!

BUT CROMWELL'S DETERMINATION TO EVEN THE SCORE WITH THE ENEMY CROWDED OUT THE PAIN OF HIS TORN BODY...
TO BLAZES WITH THE HOSPITAL! I SHOVE A BANDAGE ON AND LET ME GET OUT OF HERE! I'VE GOT THE CHANCE TO HIT JERRY WHERE IT HURTS MOST AND I'M NOT GOING TO PASS IT UP BECAUSE OF A CONFOUNDED SCRATCH!

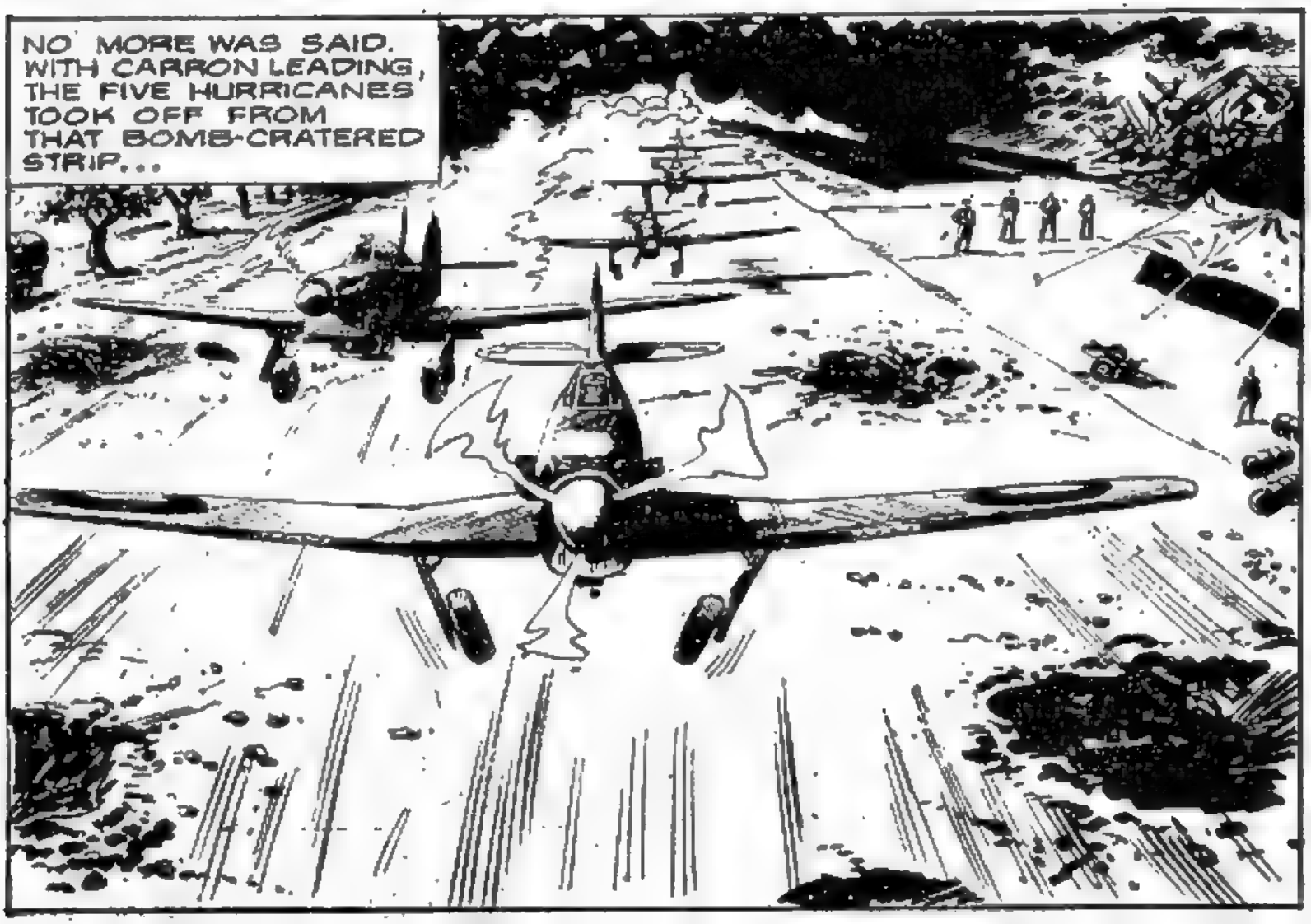
SECONDS LATER, CROMWELL FOUND THAT THE DOC. WAS RIGHT...
SEE WHAT I MEAN? YOU CAN'T EVEN PUT YOUR OWN COAT ON UNAIDED... LET ALONE FLY AN AIRCRAFT!
CUT THE LECTURE, DOC! MAYBE I CAN'T FLY FOR THE MOMENT... BUT I'LL MAKE DARN SURE THAT THE OTHERS DO!

AS THE SMOKE AND DUST LIFTED FROM THE AIRFIELD, AND THE DRONE OF THE ENEMY RAIDERS FADED INTO THE DISTANCE, CROMWELL FORCED HIS PAIN-FILLED BODY INTO ACTION.
BOWMAN! HOW MANY KITES ARE STILL AIRWORTHY?
THEY'RE ALL BADLY HOLED, SIR! BUT I RECKON FIVE COULD GET OFF AT A PUSH! THE ROCK WALL SAVED THEM FROM DIRECT HITS!
THE MAN'S IMPREGNABLE! I THOUGHT HE'D BEEN BLOWN TO PIECES!
CROMWELL TURNED ON HIS AMAZED PILOTS...
TAKE THOSE STUPID LOOKS OFF YOUR FACES...IT'LL TAKE MORE THAN A BOMB TO FINISH ME! NOW LISTEN! I WANT FIVE PLANES IN THE AIR AT ONCE! YOU'LL FOLLOW THE ENEMY BACK TO HIS BASE AND GIVE HIM A DOSE OF HIS OWN MEDICINE!

ONLY CROMWELL'S STRAINED FEATURES BETRAYED ANY SIGN OF HIS WOUNDED BODY...
THERE'S JUST ONE OTHER THING..YOU'LL BE LEADING THE ATTACK THIS TIME. CARRON!
WH-A-A-T!

CARRON COULD SCARCELY BELIEVE HIS EARS. HE STARED AT CROMWELL'S GREY, TIGHTLY-DRAWN FEATURES AND TREMBLING FRAME..AND COLD RAGE DETONATED THE WORDS FROM HIS LIPS...
I GET IT! YOU EXPECT US TO RISK OUR NECKS TRYING TO TAKE OFF ON A FUTILE ATTACK WHILE ALL YOU DO IS SIT BACK AND WATCH! WHAT KIND OF MAN DOES THAT MAKE YOU?

IGNORANT OF CROMWELL'S WOUND, CARRON HAD MISREAD THE LOOK ON THE LINED AND DRAWN FACE AS ONE OF FEAR. BUT THERE WAS NO FEAR IN THE VOICE THAT BELLOWED ITS CHALLENGING REPLY!
I DON'T HAVE TO ANSWER TO YOU FOR ANYTHING, CARRON! IF YOU THINK YOU'RE A BETTER MAN THAN ME, THEN PROVE IT! I GAVE YOU AN ORDER! LET'S SEE IF YOU'RE MAN ENOUGH TO CARRY IT OUT!


NO MORE WAS SAID. WITH CARRON LEADING, THE FIVE HURRICANES TOOK OFF FROM THAT BOMB-CRATERED STRIP...

STIFF-BACKED, CROMWELL TURNED AWAY, BUT HE WAS ALMOST STAGGERING BY THE TIME HE REACHED THE M.O.'S QUARTERS...
GOOD HEAVENS, MAN! WHY COULDN'T YOU HAVE TOLD THEM YOU WERE WOUNDED AND SO AVOIDED THAT SCENE?
IF NOT KNOWING THAT I'M WOUNDED MAKES 'EM ANGRY, DOC, THEN PERHAPS THEY'LL FLY AND FIGHT ALL THE BETTER FOR IT! IF THEY'RE TO COME OUT OF THIS ALIVE, THEN BY HEAVENS, THEY'LL NEED SOMETHING TO MAKE 'EM FIGHT!

CROMWELL'S VOICE FADED TO A WHISPER AS HIS TEETH CLENCHED TO SUPPRESS THE AGONY COURSING THROUGH HIS BODY...
I'VE BLISTERED H.Q. TO PULL US OUT OF HERE UNTIL I'M SICK OF MY OWN VOICE! BUT IF H.Q. REQUIRE US TO STAY HERE.. THEN HERE WE STAY. AND WE'LL FLY AND FIGHT UNTIL...
CROMWELL CHOKED TO SILENCE.

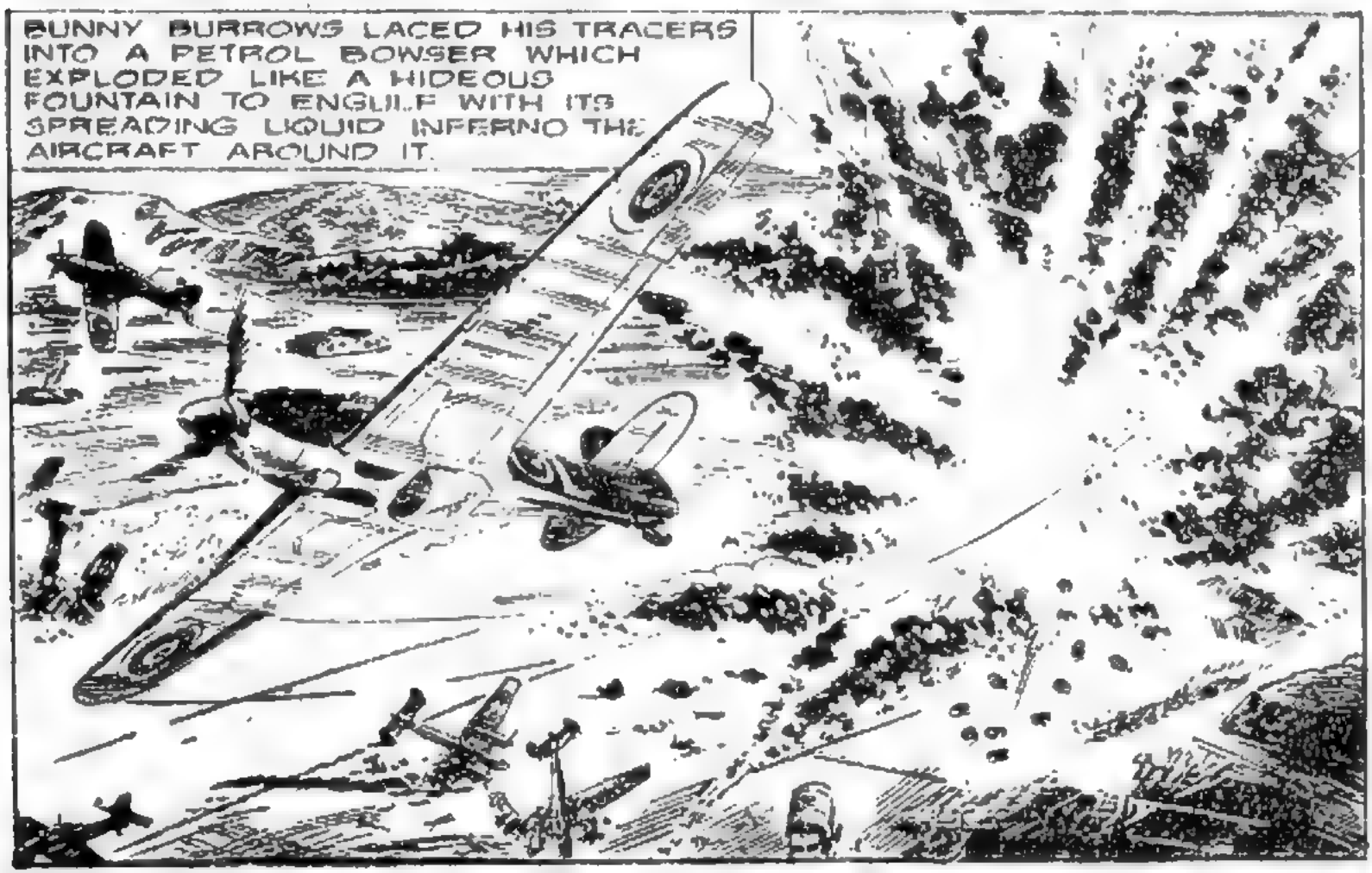
HE STRUGGLED PAINFULLY TO HIS FEET...
YOU MUST OBEY ORDERS, THEY SAID. THREATENED TO HAVE ME COURT-MARTIALLED BECAUSE I REFUSED TO GO ON SENDING MEN OUT TO BE SLAUGHTERED. WELL, I'LL SHOW 'EM.. I'LL OBEY THEIR ORDERS! IF H.Q. WANT MEN KILLED, THEN I'M THE MAN TO KILL 'EM!

THE M.O. WATCHED CROMWELL'S WRETCHED FIGURE STAGGER BLINDLY FROM THE TENT... AND THERE WAS PITY IN HIS HEART...
HE HATES WAR. AND ORDERING MEN TO THEIR DEATHS SO MUCH THAT THE ONLY WAY HE CAN CARRY ON IS TO HATE THOSE VERY MEN THEMSELVES. BUT THE HATE HAS NOW BECOME A DISEASE... IT CAN DESTROY US ALL... HIMSELF INCLUDED!

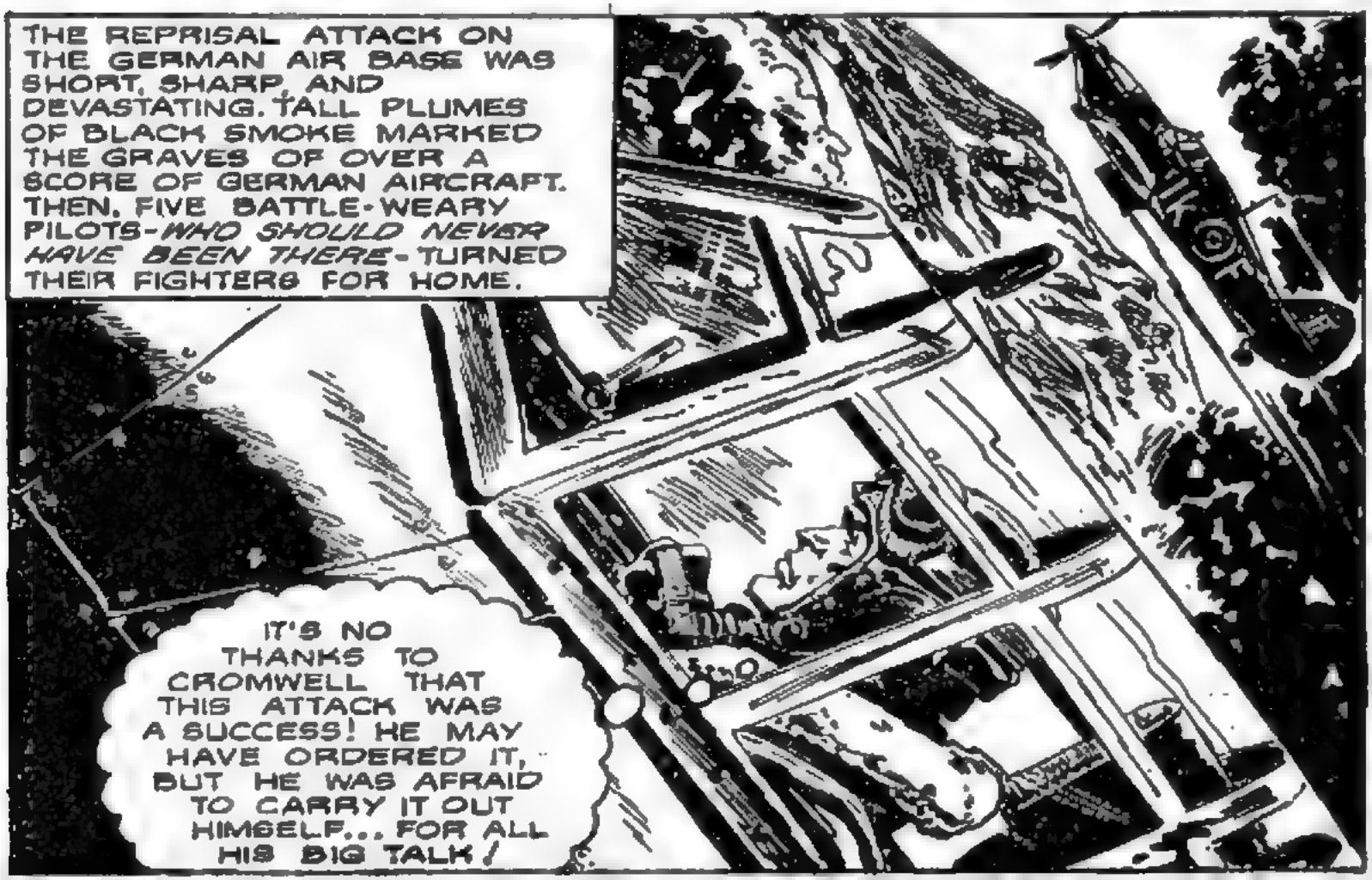
THE SIGHT OF THOSE FIVE HURRICANES BROUGHT HOPE TO ONE MAN, A DISPATCH-RIDER, FOR IT COULD MEAN THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN LIFE AND DEATH FOR HUNDREDS OF HIS COMRADES TRAPPED ON THE ESCAPE ROAD.
LUMME! AM I GLAD TO SEE THEM! THE CHAP WHO TOLD ME THAT THE R.A.F. HAD PULLED OUT TO CRETE MUST HAVE BEEN MISTAKEN!

MEANWHILE, THE AVENGING HURRICANES WERE AFTER BLOOD. A FEW MOMENTS BEFORE, IT HAD BEEN CROMWELL'S BLOOD. BUT NOW THEIR HATE WAS TURNED ON ANOTHER ENEMY... THE REAL ENEMY!
ATTACH! LINE ASTERN! LET'S GET 'EM!

THE SURPRISED ENEMY RECOVERED QUICKLY AND HIT BACK VICIOUSLY WITH FLAK AND TRACER. BUT THE EIGHT BROWNINGS OF CARRON'S FIGHTER FOUND THEIR MARK...


BUNNY BURROWS LACED HIS TRACERS INTO A PETROL BOWSER WHICH EXPLODED LIKE A HIDEOUS FOUNTAIN TO ENGULF WITH ITS SPREADING LIQUID INFERNO THE AIRCRAFT AROUND IT.

BABE WILCOX, THE BOY WHO HAD BECOME A MAN ALMOST OVERNIGHT, KNOCKED TWO VENOMOUS 110's FROM THE SKY WITH AS MANY BURSTS FROM HIS RAMPAGING GUNS


THE REPRISAL ATTACK ON THE GERMAN AIR BASE WAS SHORT, SHARP, AND DEVASTATING. TALL PLUMES OF BLACK SMOKE MARKED THE GRAVES OF OVER A SCORE OF GERMAN AIRCRAFT. THEN, FIVE BATTLE-WEARY PILOTS-*WHO SHOULD NEVER HAVE BEEN THERE*-TURNED THEIR FIGHTERS FOR HOME.
IT'S NO THANKS TO CROMWELL THAT THIS ATTACK WAS A SUCCESS! HE MAY HAVE ORDERED IT, BUT HE WAS AFRAID TO CARRY IT OUT HIMSELF... FOR ALL HIS BIG TALK!

Chapter 4. BIRTH of a SQUADRON

NIGHT BROUGHT BRIEF RELIEF TO THE REMAINING PILOTS... THEY SNATCHED WHAT FITFUL SLEEP THEY COULD. BUT NEITHER DOC. NOR CROMWELL SLEPT... THEY STOOD TOGETHER, LISTENING TO THE RUMBLING GUNFIRE CREEPING EVER NEARER.

IT MATTERED LITTLE TO THE ANXIOUS D.R. THAT HE WAS AT A FIGHTER STATION. HE HAD FOUND WHAT HE WANTED... THE RAF AND THE RAF MEANT BOMBS!
JERRY'S BEEN SHELLING OUR COLUMNS ALL AFTERNOON, POOR DEVILS. IT'LL BE MURDER WHEN THEY OPEN UP AGAIN AT DAWN! WE'VE GOT NO ARTILLERY, SIR, AND THE BRIGADIER WANTS YOU TO 'ELP OUT WITH A FEW BOMBS!
BOMBS!
TO THE DOC. THE BRIGADIER'S REQUEST REACHED THE HEIGHTS OF SHEER FANTASY. BUT CROMWELL ONLY SPOKE URGENTLY TO THE D.R. AND THEN...

BOWMAN! BOWMAN! WHERE THE DEVIL'S THAT FITTER?
GOOD HEAVENS! YOU... YOU CAN'T POSSIBLY COMPLY WITH THAT REQUEST! IT'S... IT'S UNTHINKABLE!

UNTHINKABLE, DOC? IS TRYING TO SAVE THE LIVES OF HUNDREDS OF MEN UNTHINKABLE? AT LAST WE CAN STRIKE WHERE WE'RE REALLY NEEDED! MACHINE-GUNS WON'T STOP THOSE GUNS, BUT BOMBS WILL! AND WE'RE GOING TO DROP 'EM!

FLIGHT SERGEANT BOWMAN AND HIS OVERWORKED FITTERS WERE ATTUNED TO EXPECT AND TO DO ANYTHING — THAT IS, ALMOST ANYTHING!
LISTEN, BOWMAN! I WANT BOMB-RACKS RIGGED ON EVERY KITE THAT'LL FLY... AND I WANT IT DONE BY DAWN! THE LIVES OF HUNDREDS OF MEN ARE AT STAKE! SO GET TO IT!
LUMME! B-BOMB-RACKS..?

BOWMAN'S CAPABLE FACE WRINKLED WITH DOUBT AS HE THOUGHT OVER THE TECHNICAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE ORDER...
WE'VE GOT THE BOMBS... THOSE LEFT BEHIND BY THE BLENHEIM SQUADRON. CAN YOU TACKLE THE JOB?
IT CAN BE DONE, SIR, BUT HEAVEN KNOWS HOW THE OLD KITES WILL GET OFF THE GROUND WITH A BOMB-LOAD UP.

THE SUDDEN STIR OF EXCITEMENT ON THE AIRSTRIP HAD BROUGHT OTHER FIGURES RUNNING, CARRON INCLUDED.
IF WEIGHT'S THE ONLY SNAG, THEN YOU'LL STRIP GUNS, AMMUNITION, AND EVERY PIECE OF UNNECESSARY GEAR FROM THE AIRCRAFT!
VERY WELL, IF YOU SAY SO, SIR!

CARRON HAD NOT HEARD THE WHOLE STORY... BUT HE HAD HEARD ENOUGH TO STAB FEAR INTO THE HEART OF ANY FIGHTER PILOT.
GOOD GRIEF! NO GUNS? YOU CAN'T EXPECT US TO...
I GIVE THE ORDERS AROUND HERE, CARRON! YOU'LL TAKE OFF AT DAWN WITH BOMB-LOADS TO ATTACK THE ENEMY'S HEAVY BATTERY NORTH OF THE THEBES ROAD!

ALL THE HATRED THAT CARRON HAD BUILT UP AGAINST CROMWELL EXPLODED IN ONE VIOLENT OUTBURST...
YOU THREATENED TO HAVE ME SHOT THE LAST TIME I OPENED MY MOUTH! WELL, GO AHEAD...SHOOT! KILL US ALL ON THE GROUND! IT MAKES NO DIFFERENCE WHERE WE DIE... BECAUSE IF YOU SEND US UP WITHOUT THE MEANS TO DEFEND OURSELVES THEN YOU'RE NOTHING MORE THAN A COLD-BLOODED MURDERER!

CROMWELL LUNGED DANGEROUSLY TOWARDS CARRON, HIS SUNKEN EYES BLAZING...
YOU CALL ME A MURDERER, CARRON, BECAUSE I'M SENDING YOU UP WITHOUT GUNS. WELL, MAYBE I AM! BUT I'M GIVING YOU BOMBS WHICH CAN SAVE THE LIVES OF HUNDREDS OF MEN WHAT WILL YOU CALL YOURSELF IF YOU FAIL TO USE THEM?
CARRON DID NOT ANSWER... COULD NOT ANSWER.

THROUGHOUT THE NIGHT, BOWMAN AND HIS FITTERS WORKED LIKE SLAVES AND, JUST BEFORE DAWN, THE CRUDE BOMB-RACKS WERE ALMOST COMPLETED.
CROMWELL'S TAKING A CHANCE WITH THIS MAD-BRAIN SCHEME, AIN'T HE?
THAT'S NONE OF YOUR BUSINESS, HAWKINS. YOUR BUSINESS IS TO GET THOSE BOMBS SLUNG.. AND BE QUICK ABOUT IT!

THE COLD MORNING AIR CHILLED THE FIVE FLYERS AS THEY LISTENED IN SILENCE TO THE SWAYING WRECK OF A MAN WHO BRIEFED THEM.
I'M NOT CERTAIN OF THE ENEMY GUN POSITIONS.. THEY COULD BE SITED ANYWHERE ALONG THIS HIGH GROUND. THEIR FLASHES WILL GIVE 'EM AWAY! SO WHEN YOU SPOT 'EM... HIT 'EM! AND HIT 'EM HARD!

THE UNARMED HURRICANES WITH A 250-POUNDER SLUNG BENEATH EACH WING AWAITED THEM ON THE STRIP.
WE'D BE FULLY JUSTIFIED IN RELIEVING THAT MANIAC OF HIS COMMAND!
I'M BEYOND ARGUING, BUNNY. LET'S GET IT OVER ONE WAY OR THE OTHER!
GROANING UNDER EXCESSIVE LOAD, THE BOMBED-UP HURRICANES HAULED INTO THE AIR.
I FEEL SO HELPLESS, WATCHING THEM GO UNARMED TO WHAT COULD BE CERTAIN...
SAY IT, DOC... DON'T BE SQUEAMISH. DEATH IS THE WORD YOU WANT. YOU FEEL HELPLESS.. YOU'RE NOT EVEN A FLYING MAN! NOW PERHAPS YOU CAN UNDERSTAND HOW I FEEL!

THE SOUND OF THE DEPARTING HURRICANE ENGINES HAD BARELY FADED FROM THE SKY WHEN A MOTOR-CYCLIST SPED ACROSS THE AIRSTRIP.
THE DISPATCH-RIDER! HE'S BACK! BLAZES! HAVEN'T WE DONE ENOUGH FOR THE ARMY?
HE'S NOT WORKING FOR THE ARMY, DOC... HE'S WORKING FOR ME! I ASKED HIM TO TRY TO CONTACT OUR H.Q.

WHITE-FACED, THE DISPATCH-RIDER SPRANG FROM HIS MACHINE AND RACED UP TO CROMWELL.
THERE'S BEEN A HECK OF A MIX-UP, SIR! YOU WERE SUPPOSED TO HAVE RECEIVED AN ORDER TO PULL OUT TWO DAYS AGO! YOU'RE TO CANCEL THE BOMB. ATTACK AND SET OUT QUICK! BOMBERS FROM CRETE WILL DEAL WITH THE ENEMY GUNS!
WHAT..?

HIS MIND ALREADY TORMENTED BEYOND MEASURE BY THE PAIN OF HIS WOUND, CROMWELL COULD ABSORB NO MORE...
PULL OUT..? CANCEL THE ATTACK..? IT'S..IT'S TOO LATE! I'VE SENT THOSE MEN TO THEIR DEATHS... AND THERE'S NO RADIO TO CALL THEM BACK! IT'S TRUE...CARRON'S RIGHT.. I'M A MURDERER!
DON'T TALK LIKE A FOOL, MAN! YOU DID WHAT YOU HAD TO DO!

LIKE AN ANIMAL AT BAY, CROMWELL THRUST OFF THE DOC'S MINISTRATIONS...
BOWMAN! THE R/T SETS IN THE WRECKED AIRCRAFT..IS ONE STILL SERVICEABLE? WE MIGHT BE ABLE TO CALL 'EM BACK ON THAT!

BUT THE FATE THAT HAD DOGGED 017 SQUADRON FROM THE VERY BEGINNING DEALT THEM YET ANOTHER BLOW.
THE SETS ARE IN THE SAME STATE AS THE KITES, SIR.. COMPLETE WRITE-OFFS!
THEN TO BLAZES WITH IT! GET ONE OF THOSE SO-CALLED WRITE-OFFS ON THE STRIP! IF THE ENGINE WILL FIRE, THEN, BY HEAVENS, I'LL FLY IT! MOVE! OR MEN WILL DIE— AND I'LL HAVE KILLED THEM!

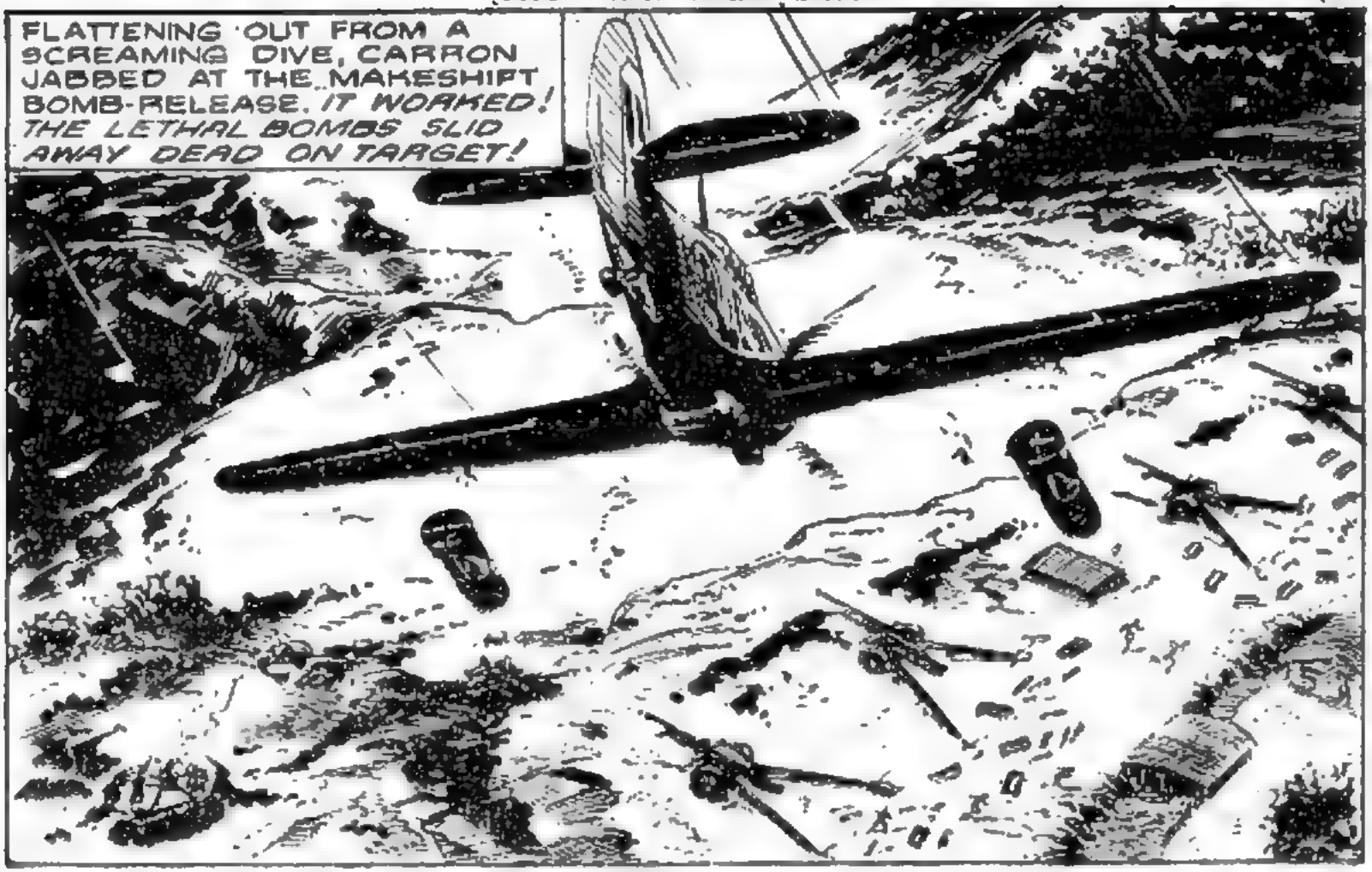
A BATTERED HURRICANE WAS QUICKLY ROLLED FROM COVER. IT HAD FUEL! IT HAD GUNS! ALL IT NEEDED WAS A PILOT.
FOR HEAVENS SAKE, LISTEN TO ME, MAN! YOU'RE IN A WORSE STATE THAN THIS CRAFT! IF IT'LL FLY AT ALL THEN YOU'LL NEVER FLY IT!.. YOU'RE LIABLE TO PASS OUT ANY MINUTE!
IT'S GUNS THAT ARE NEEDED NOW, DOC... THEY'LL DO ALL THE TALKING. THAT'S NECESSARY! STAND CLEAR!

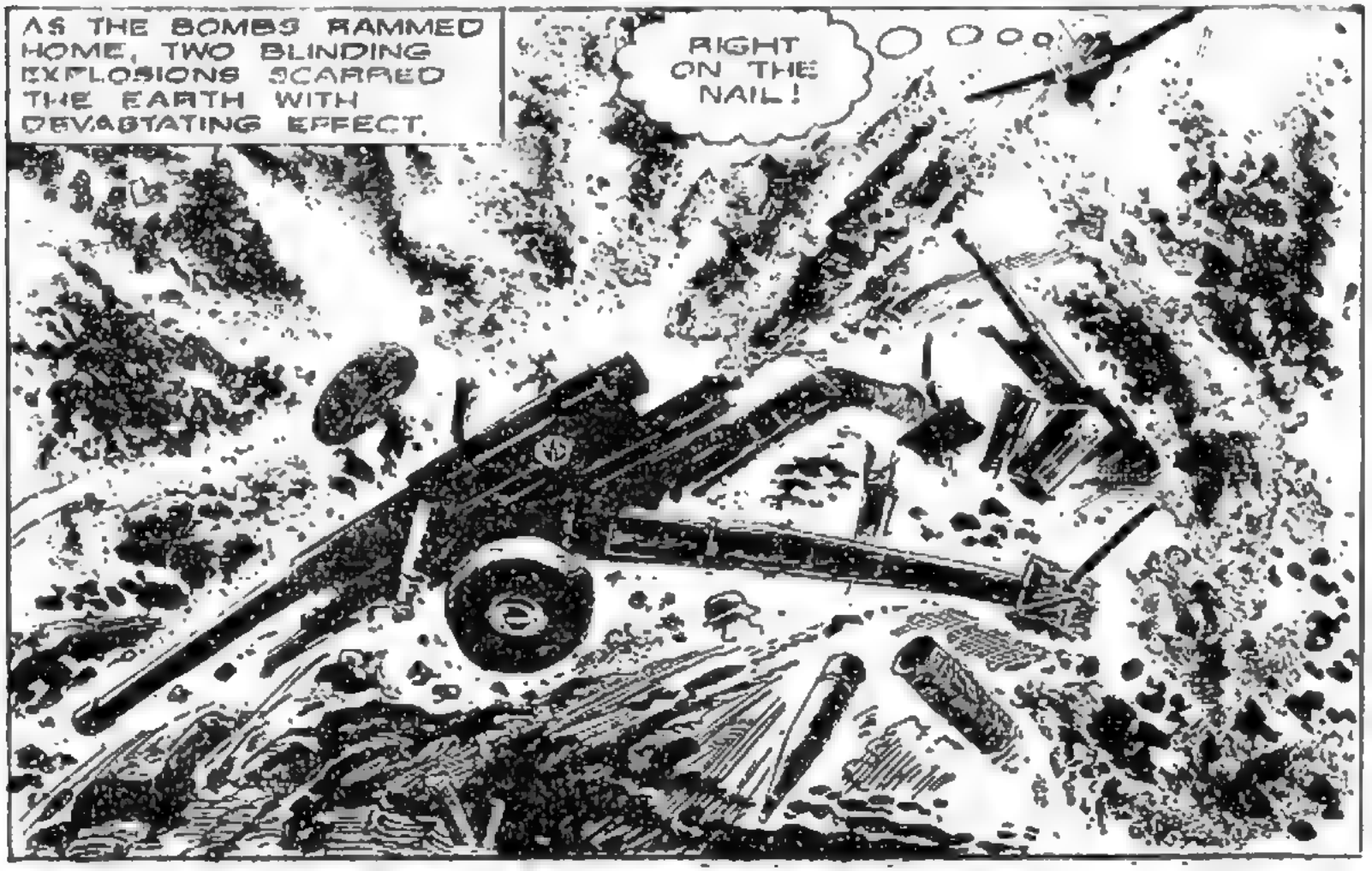
THE BULLET AND SHELL-SCARRED HURRICANE CLAWED ITS WAY INTO THE AIR, CAUSING EXCRUCIATING AGONY TO THE MAN IN THE COCKPIT.
AGH!.. MUSTN'T PASS OUT.. GOT TO HOLD ON.. GOT TO... HOLD.. ON!

ALREADY, THE FIVE UNARMED HURRICANES WERE HEDGE-HOPPING NORTHWARDS ABOVE THE LINE OF MEN AND VEHICLES ON THE TREACHEROUS THEBES ROAD.
STONE THE CROWS! NOW I'VE SEEN IT ALL... HURRICANES WITH BOMBS ON! RECKON THEY MUST BE AFTER THOSE JERRY GUNS. UP THE RAF!

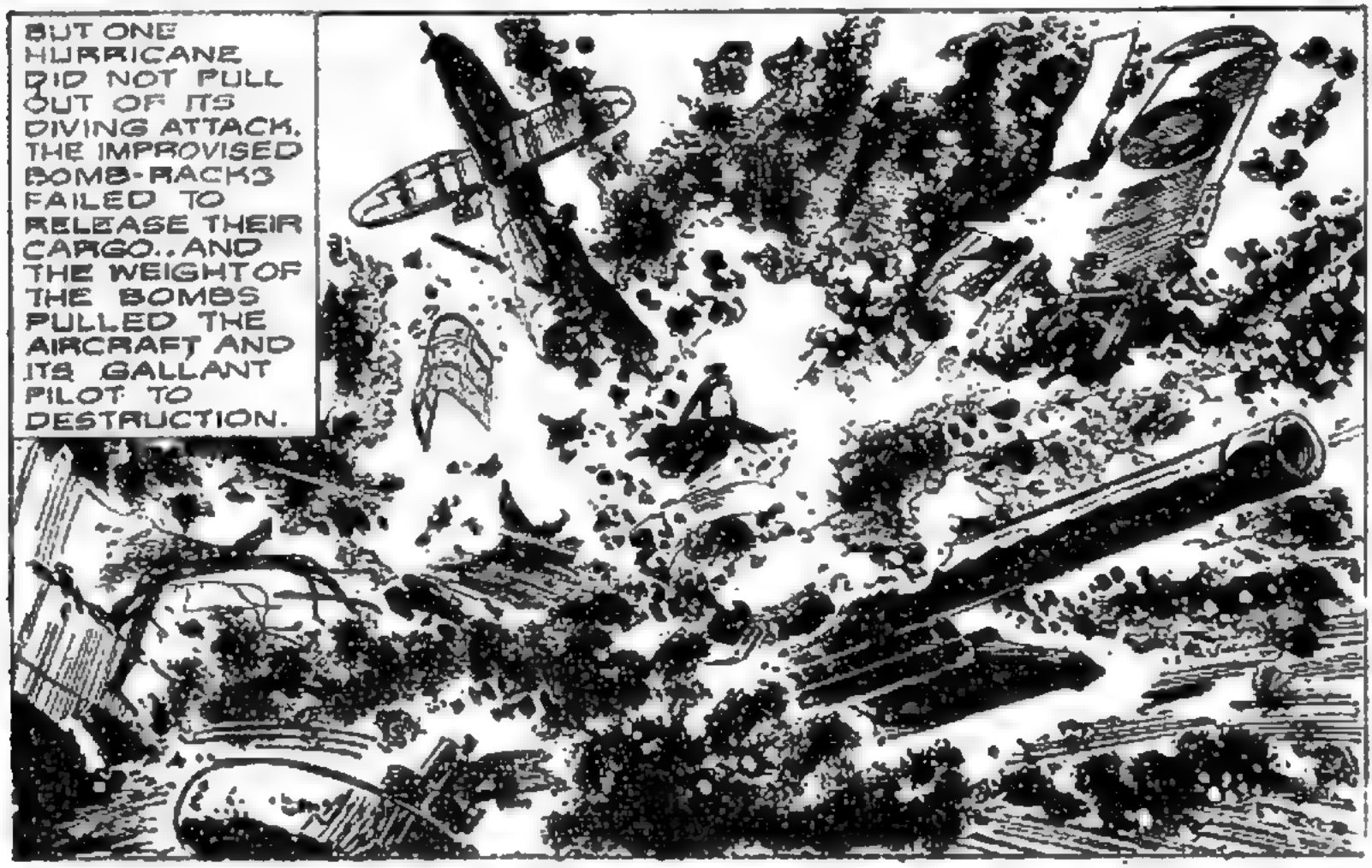
CARRON'S TIRED EYES SCANNED THE FAST CLOSING HIGH GROUND AHEAD. THEN HE SAW THE GUNS... THE FIRST FLICKERING FLASHES: BECKONED LIKE A BEACON.
THERE THEY ARE... TO THE NORTH-EAST! LET'S MAKE THIS ATTACK ONE THAT WILL BE REMEMBERED! LINE ASTERN! GO! GO! GO!

CARRON'S CALL FELL LIKE A BATTLE CRY ON THE EARS OF THE YOUNG PILOTS, AS THEY LUNGED IN TOWARDS THE ENEMY GUN POSITIONS.
ACHTUNG! ACHTUNG! ENEMY PLANES! ACHTUNG!

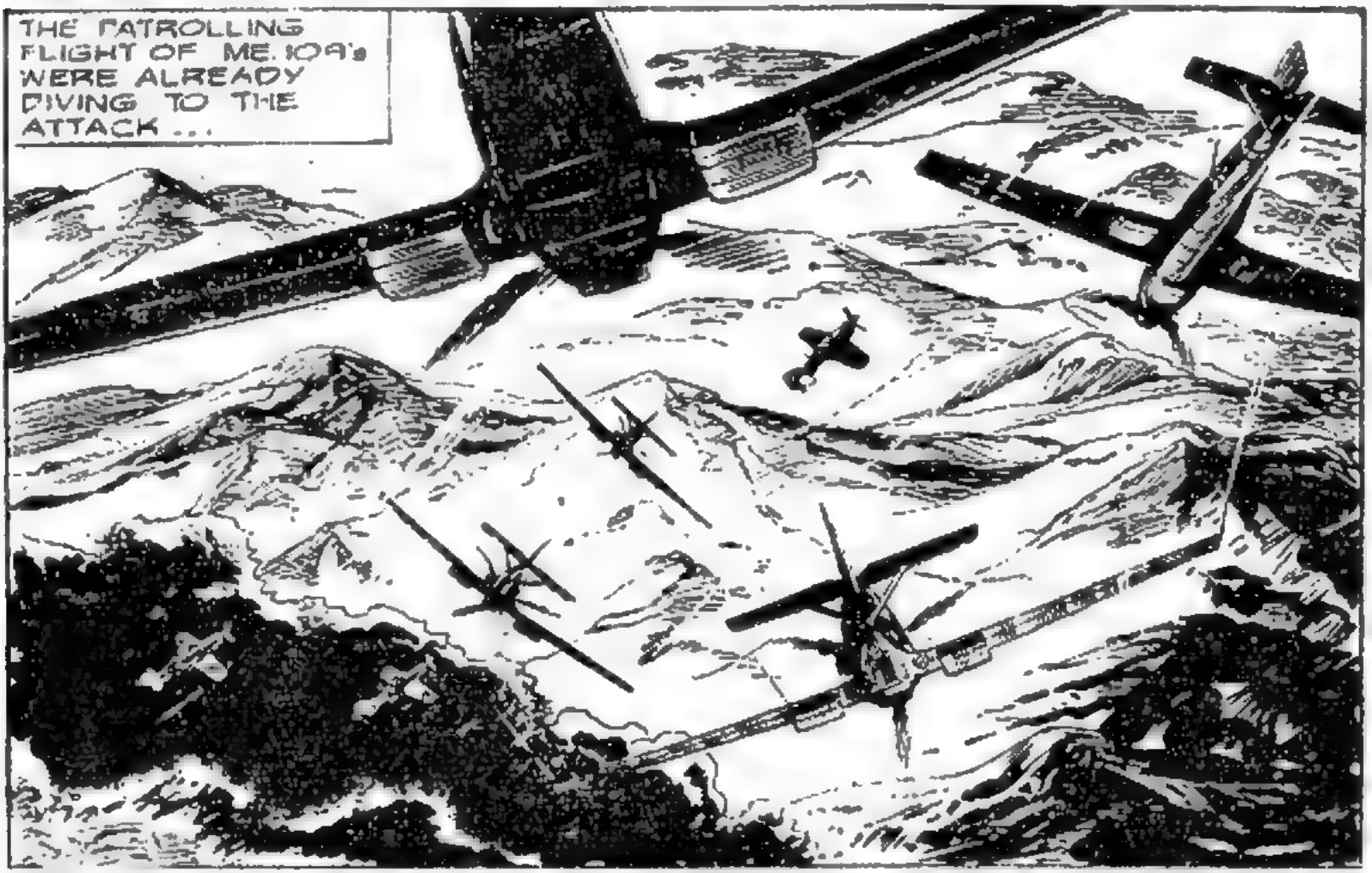

FLATTENING OUT FROM A SCREAMING DIVE, CARRON JABBED AT THE MAKESHIFT BOMB-RELEASE. IT WORKED! THE LETHAL BOMBS SLID AWAY DEAD ON TARGET!


AS THE BOMBS RAMMED HOME, TWO BLINDING EXPLOSIONS SCARRED THE EARTH WITH DEVASTATING EFFECT.
RIGHT ON THE NAIL!

THROUGH A HAIL OF BLAZING TRACER, THE HURRICANES FOLLOWED UP THEIR LEADER'S ATTACK, SMASHING BOMB AFTER BOMB ON THE GERMAN GUNS.


BUT ONE HURRICANE DID NOT PULL OUT OF ITS DIVING ATTACK. THE IMPROVISED BOMB-RACKS FAILED TO RELEASE THEIR CARGO.. AND THE WEIGHT OF THE BOMBS PULLED THE AIRCRAFT AND ITS GALLANT PILOT TO DESTRUCTION.

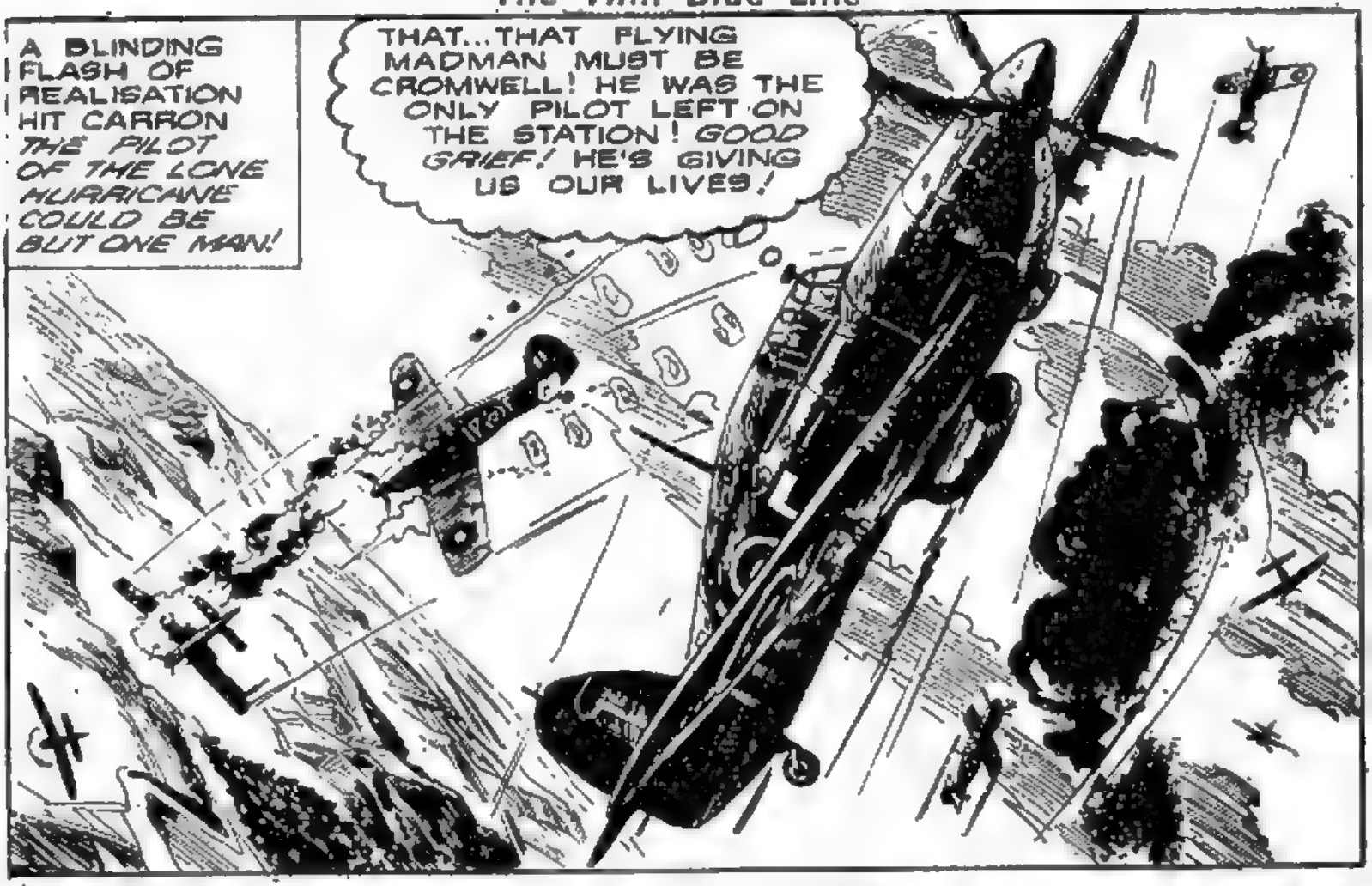
CROMWELL'S MAD-BRAINED BOMB ATTACK HAD COME OFF. TROOPS COULD NOW PASS UNMOLESTED ALONG THE ESCAPE ROAD TO THE EVACUATION PORTS. BUT ESCAPE FOR THE UNARMED PILOTS WAS TO BE ANOTHER MATTER!
BANDITS! TWO O'CLOCK HIGH!
NOW WE'RE FOR IT! PULL THE STOPS, LADS! IT'S EITHER THE CLOUDS OR GLORY!


THE PATROLLING FLIGHT OF ME.109's WERE ALREADY DIVING TO THE ATTACK ...

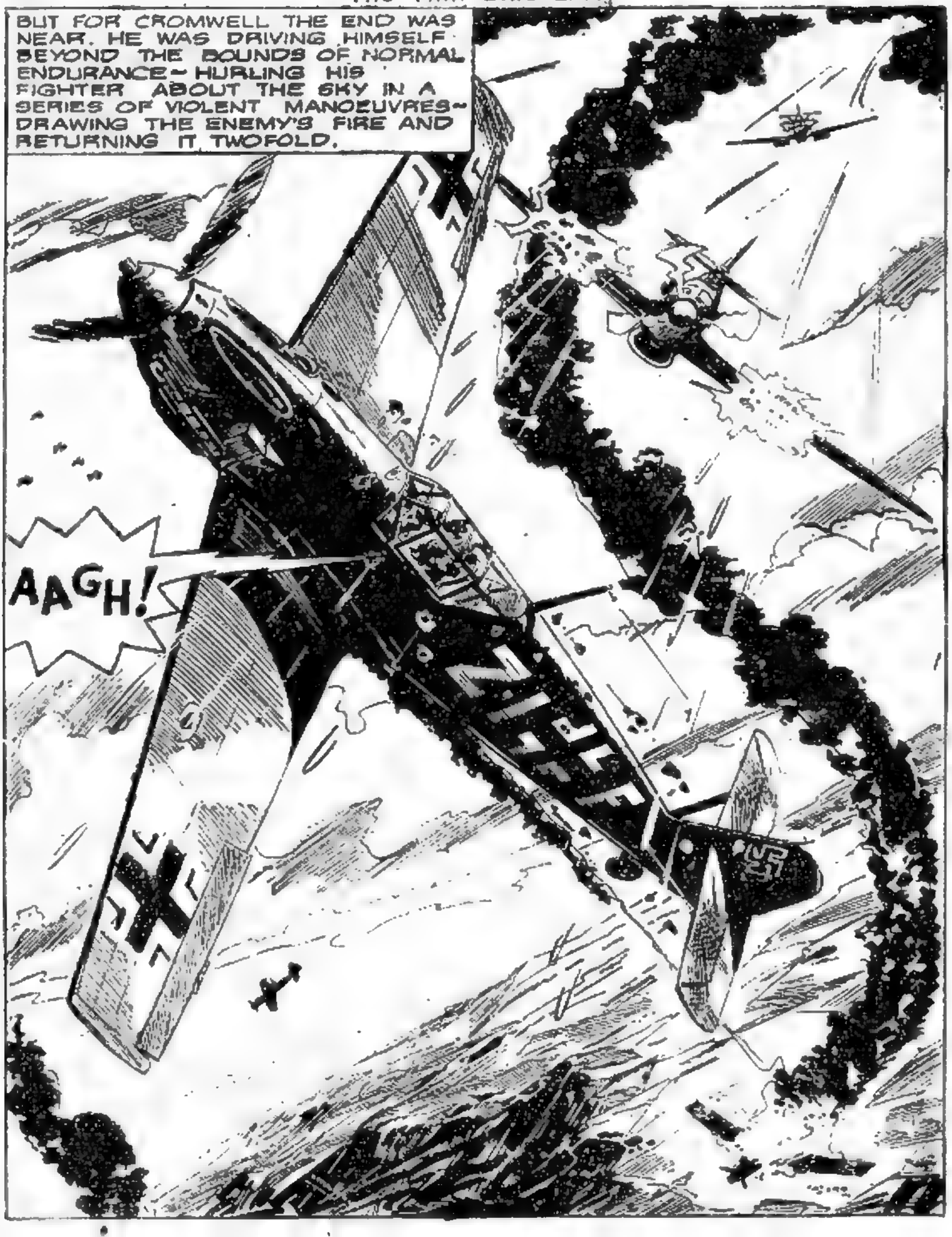
IT WAS AT THAT MOMENT, WITH THE STRENGTH FAST EBBING FROM HIM, THAT CROMWELL HURLED HIS SHUDDERING FIGHTER TO THE DEFENCE OF HIS PILOTS.
RUN FOR IT, LADS... FOR HEAVENS' SAKE, RUN FOR IT! CAN'T... HOLD ON... MUCH LONGER!
STRIVING DESPERATELY TO HOLD COURSE WITH ONLY ONE ARM, HIS STAMMERING GUNS BLEW THE LEADING ME.109 FROM THE SKY!

CARRON GAPED IN AMAZEMENT AS THE GERMAN FIGHTER DISINTEGRATED BEFORE HIS EYES.
WHAT THE BLAZES..?

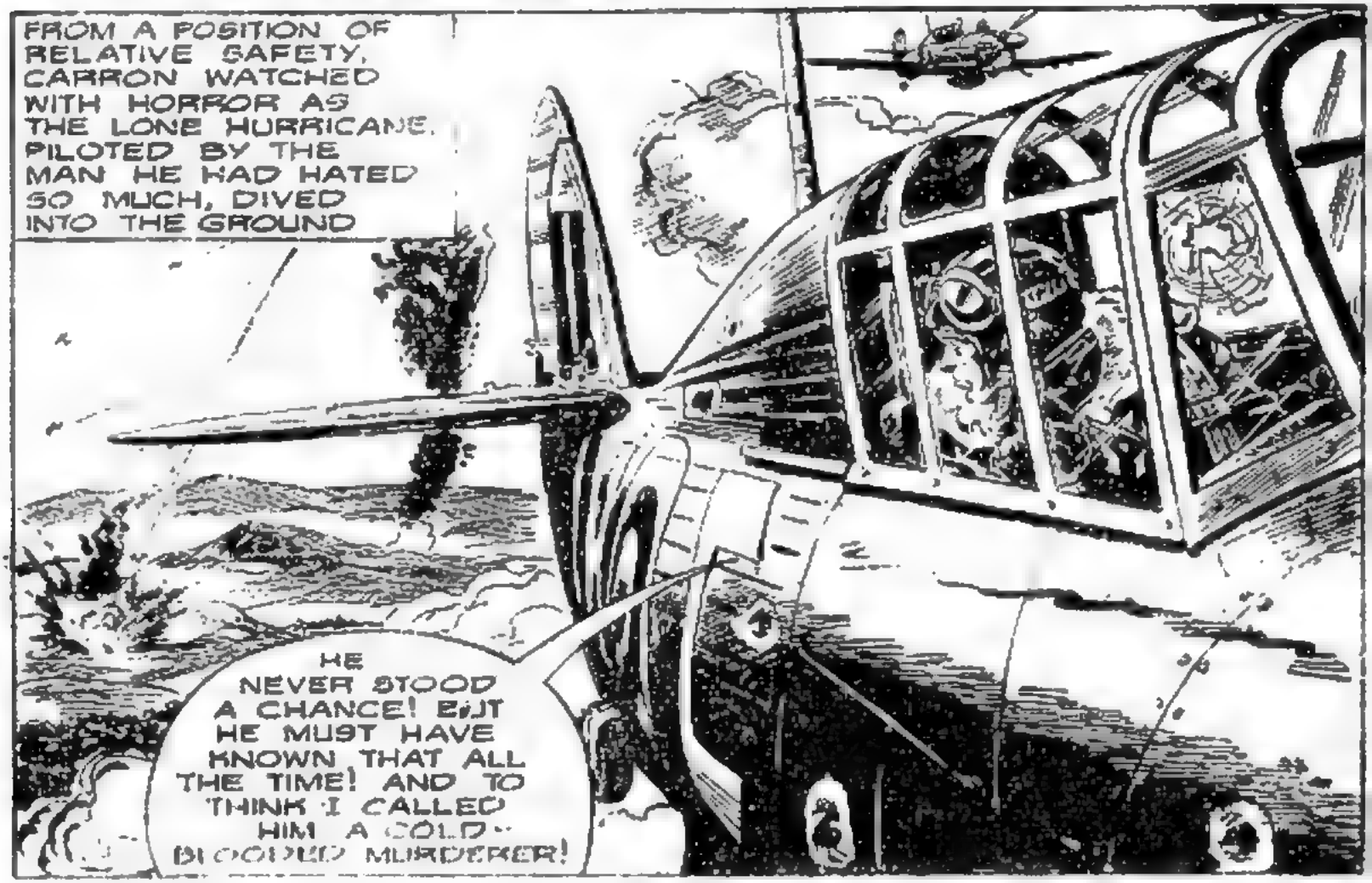
CARRON SUDDENLY SAW THE LONE HURRICANE TEARING INTO THE ENEMY— ITS GUN PORTS BLAZING!
BY HECK, THAT'S ONE OF OUR KITES! BUT.. IT'S GOT GUNS! WHO..?

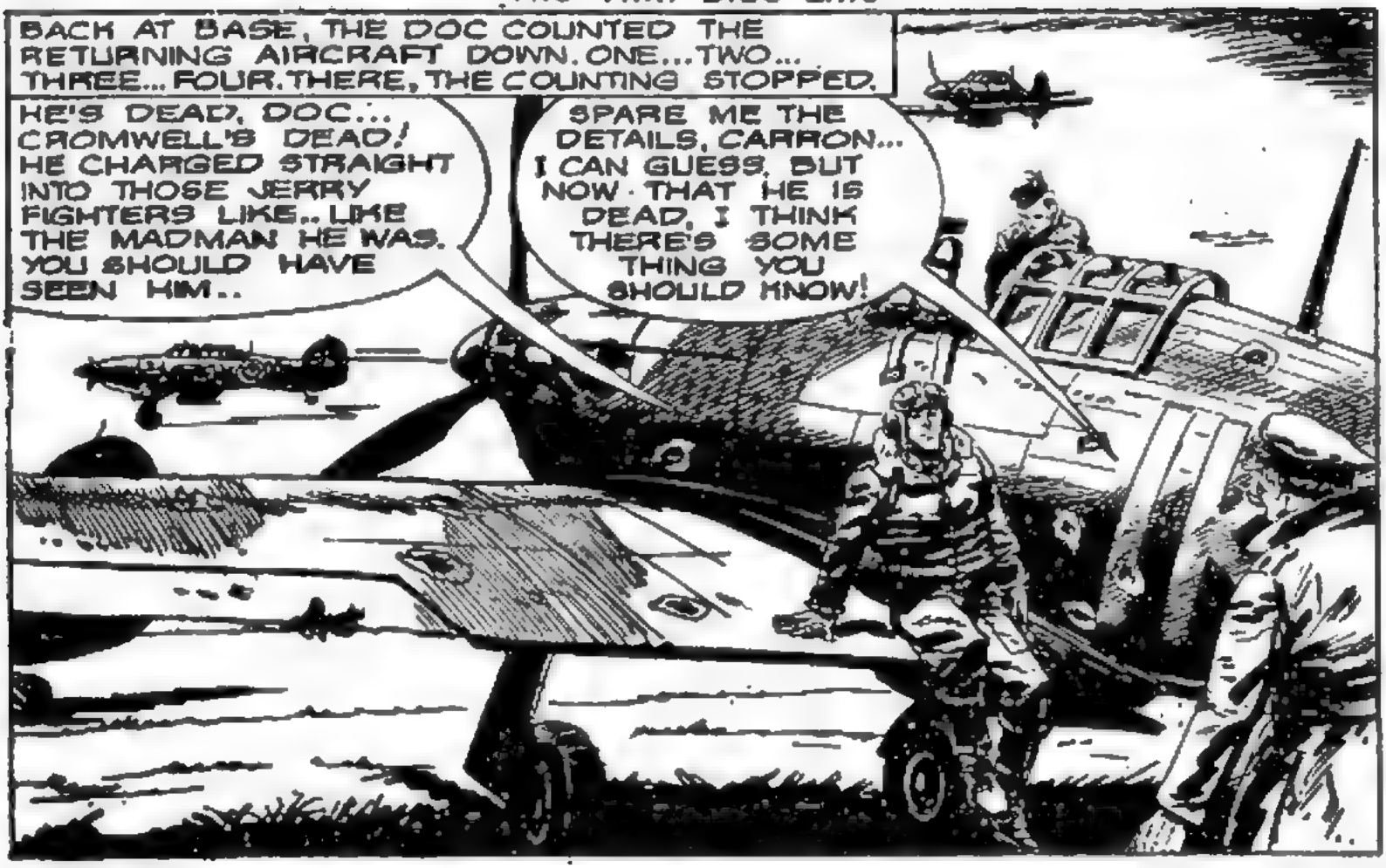

A BLINDING FLASH OF REALISATION HIT CARRON THE PILOT OF THE LONE HURRICANE COULD BE BUT ONE MAN!
THAT...THAT FLYING MADMAN MUST BE CROMWELL! HE WAS THE ONLY PILOT LEFT ON THE STATION! GOOD GRIEF! HE'S GIVING US OUR LIVES!

TAKING FULL ADVANTAGE OF THE FLEETING SECONDS WON FOR THEM BY CROMWELL'S SUICIDAL ATTACK, THE DEFENCELESS HURRICANES STREAKED FOR THE CLOUDS.
GET GOING, LADS... YOU'VE DONE YOUR BIT..AND MORE! NOW... IT'S MY TURN!


BUT FOR CROMWELL THE END WAS NEAR. HE WAS DRIVING HIMSELF BEYOND THE BOUNDS OF NORMAL ENDURANCE – HURLING HIS FIGHTER ABOUT THE SKY IN A SERIES OF VIOLENT MANOEUVRES – DRAWING THE ENEMY'S FIRE AND RETURNING IT TWOFOLD.
AAGH!
ZIEP!

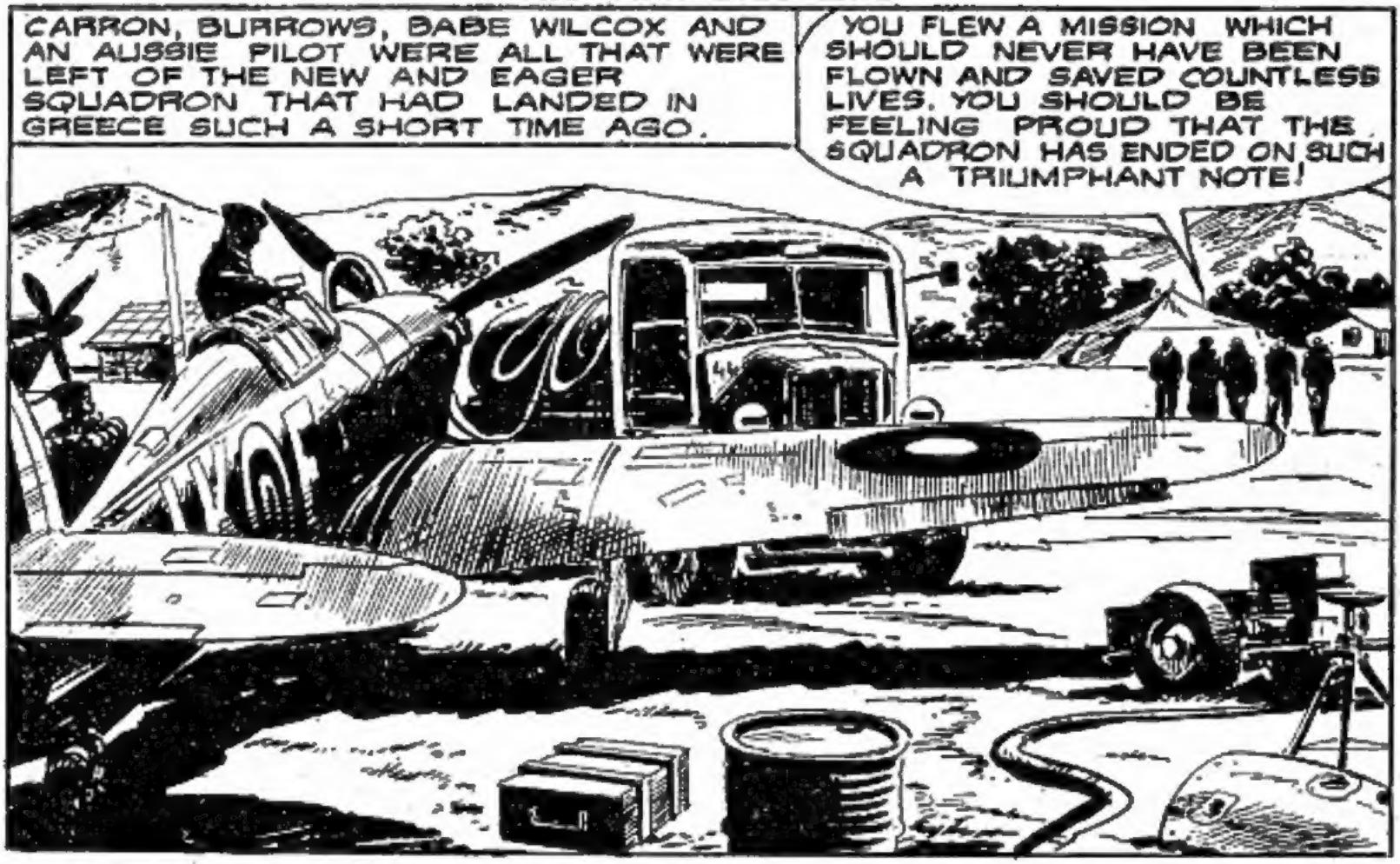
YET WHEN THE END DID COME, IT WAS NOT BROUGHT ABOUT BY ENEMY BULLETS. IT WAS THE BLACK DEPTHS OF UNCONSCIOUSNESS AGAINST WHICH CROMWELL HAD FOUGHT FOR SO LONG THAT FINALLY OVERWHELMED HIM . . .

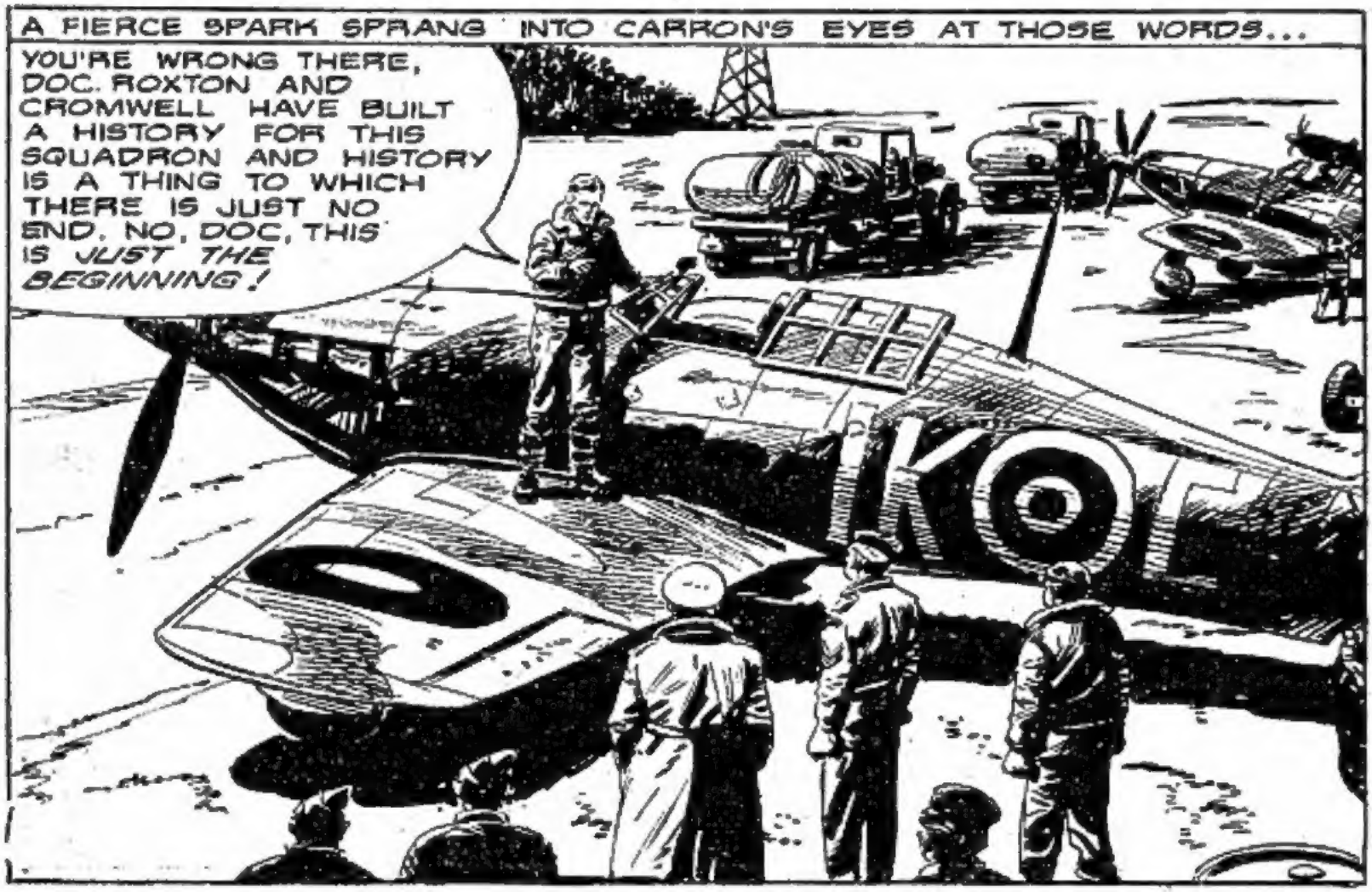

FROM A POSITION OF RELATIVE SAFETY, CARRON WATCHED WITH HORROR AS THE LONE HURRICANE, PILOTED BY THE MAN HE HAD HATED SO MUCH, DIVED INTO THE GROUND
HE NEVER STOOD A CHANCE! BUT HE MUST HAVE KNOWN THAT ALL THE TIME! AND TO THINK I CALLED HIM A COLD-BLOODED MURDERER!


BACK AT BASE, THE DOC COUNTED THE RETURNING AIRCRAFT DOWN. ONE... TWO... THREE... FOUR. THERE, THE COUNTING STOPPED.
HE'S DEAD, DOC... CROMWELL'S DEAD! HE CHARGED STRAIGHT INTO THOSE JERRY FIGHTERS LIKE.. LIKE THE MADMAN HE WAS. YOU SHOULD HAVE SEEN HIM..
SPARE ME THE DETAILS, CARRON... I CAN GUESS, BUT NOW THAT HE IS DEAD, I THINK THERE'S SOME THING YOU SHOULD KNOW!

IT WAS THEN THAT THE DOC TOLD THEM ABOUT THE REAL JOE CROMWELL... THE MAN THEY NEVER KNEW... THE MAN WHO CROMWELL HIMSELF DID NOT WANT THEM TO KNOW.
YOU CALLED HIM A MADMAN.. WELL, PERHAPS HE WAS.. BUT, BENEATH IT ALL, HE WAS A MAN!

IT JUST GOES TO SHOW HOW WRONG YOU CAN BE ABOUT A MAN, DOC. BUT IT'S TOO LATE TO APOLOGISE NOW!
NO APOLOGY IS NEEDED, CARRON, AND CROMWELL WOULD HAVE BEEN THE LAST MAN TO HAVE EXPECTED ONE!


CARRON, BURROWS, BABE WILCOX AND AN AUSSIE PILOT WERE ALL THAT WERE LEFT OF THE NEW AND EAGER SQUADRON THAT HAD LANDED IN GREECE SUCH A SHORT TIME AGO.
YOU FLEW A MISSION WHICH SHOULD NEVER HAVE BEEN FLOWN AND SAVED COUNTLESS LIVES. YOU SHOULD BE FEELING PROUD THAT THE SQUADRON HAS ENDED ON SUCH A TRIUMPHANT NOTE!


A FIERCE SPARK SPRANG INTO CARRON'S EYES AT THOSE WORDS...
YOU'RE WRONG THERE, DOC. ROXTON AND CROMWELL HAVE BUILT A HISTORY FOR THIS SQUADRON AND HISTORY IS A THING TO WHICH THERE IS JUST NO END. NO, DOC, THIS IS JUST THE BEGINNING!

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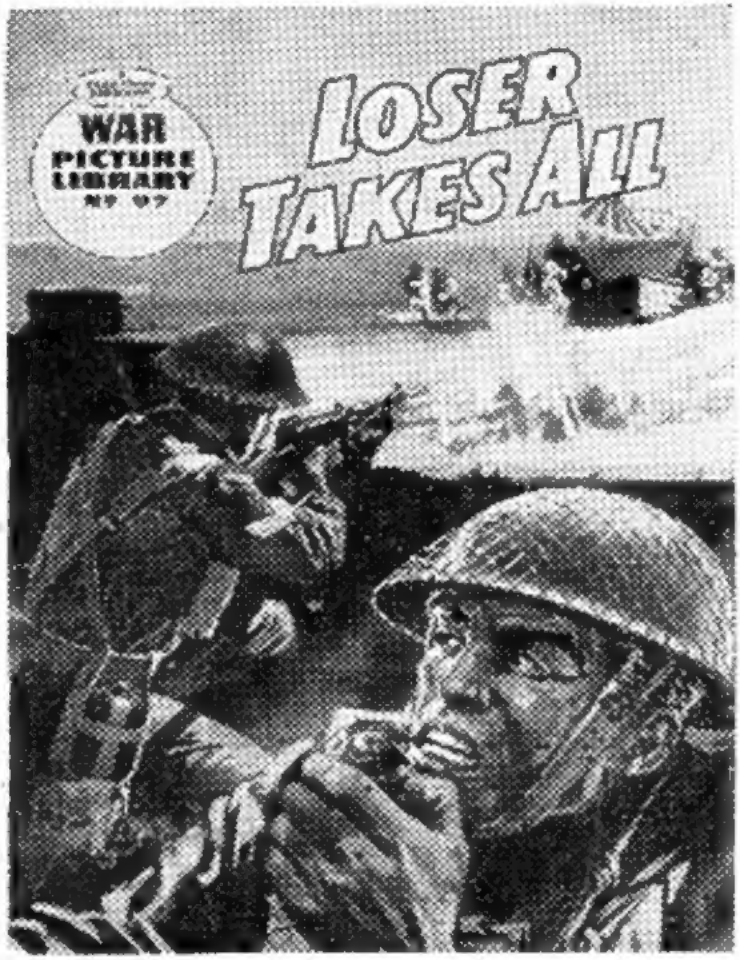

Evil men with the rising sun on their helmets stalked the jungle of New Guinea and the Aussies knew they must kill—or be killed !

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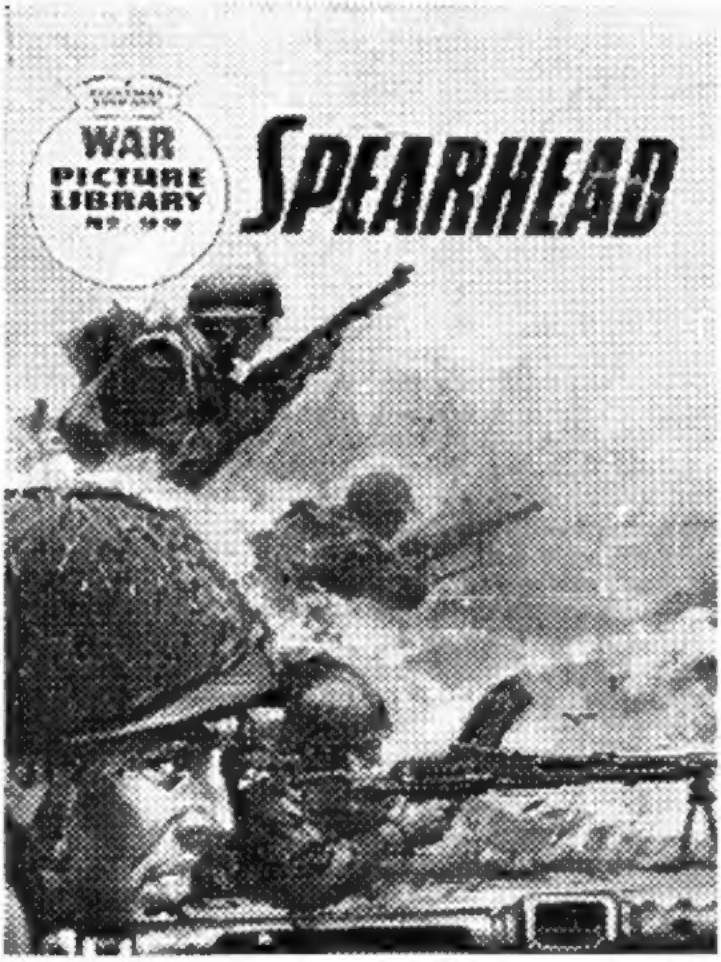

The gliders rocked wildly in the flak bursts. Three thousand yards still to go—and they were falling too fast. They had been dropped too soon.

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